

# JUDAISM

## **The Enduring Legend of the Jewish Pope**

*David Levine Lerner*

## **Biblical Prophetesses**

*Leila L. Bronner*

*Naomi Graetz*

## **Jackie Mason's World According to Hollywood**

*Robert Jancu*

## **The String That Leads the Kite: Steven S. Schwarzschild's (1924-1989) View of Jewish Philosophy**

*José R. Maia Neto*

ISSUE No. 158 / VOLUME 40 / NUMBER 2 / \$6.00

**SPRING 1991**

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS

## STATEMENT OF SPONSORSHIP

The American Jewish Congress is sponsoring the publication of JUDAISM: A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF JEWISH LIFE AND THOUGHT as part of its basic policy to stimulate an informed awareness of Jewish affairs, encourage Jewish scholarship and adequate opportunities for Jewish education, and generally foster the affirmation of Jewish religious, cultural, and historic identity.

JUDAISM, conceived as a free and non-partisan organ, is dedicated to the creative discussion and exposition of the religious, moral and philosophical concepts of Judaism and their relevance to the problems of modern society.

Views and opinions expressed in the articles and reviews are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Editors or the American Jewish Congress.

## NOTICE TO AUTHORS

The Editors are always pleased to examine material submitted for publication. Manuscripts should be sent to: Editors, JUDAISM, 15 East 84th St., New York, N.Y. 10028-0458. Unsolicited contributions will be returned only if accompanied by postage.

Material appearing in the pages of JUDAISM (except for brief passages cited for discussion) may not be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the Editors.

Articles published in this journal are abstracted and indexed in *Religious and Theological Abstracts* and *The Index of Jewish Periodicals*.

## NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

Subscribers are urgently requested to notify our office in writing six weeks before a change of address takes place. In the absence of such notification, all copies returned to us by the post office will be remailed only upon the payment of the additional postage.

All copies that are not returned to us by the post office will be replaced only upon the payment for the additional copy, as well as for the additional postage.

JUDAISM: A QUARTERLY JOURNAL is published by the American Jewish Congress. It appears in Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. Office of Publication: 15 East 84th St., New York, N.Y. 10028-0458. Re-entered as second-class matter at Post Office, New York City, N.Y. Send address changes to JUDAISM, 15 East 84th St., New York, N.Y. 10028-0458.

	Subscription Rates		
	U.S.	Canada and Foreign	Institutions/Libraries
1 year	\$20	\$22	\$35
2 years	36	40	65
3 years	50	56	90
* Student	10	12	—

Single copies: for individuals, \$6.00; for institutions/libraries, \$10.00.

\* Orders and requests must be accompanied by valid, current student I.D.

All payments for subscriptions and mailings, including outside of the United States, must be paid for in American dollars and drawn on an American bank. Make checks payable to the order of JUDAISM, and send to 15 East 84th Street, New York, N.Y. 10028-0458.

US ISSN 0022-5762

Copyright © 1991 by the American Jewish Congress.

MAY 1 1991

# JUDAISM

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL

Issue No. 158 / Volume 40 / Number 2 / Spring 1991

<i>The First Reader</i>	R.B.W.	131
<i>Jackie Mason's World According to Hollywood</i>	ROBERT JANCU	134
<i>The Enduring Legend of the Jewish Pope</i>	DAVID LEVINE LERNER	148
<i>Biblical Prophetesses Through Rabbinic Lenses</i>	LEILA L. BRONNER	171
<i>Miriam: Guilty Or Not Guilty?</i>	NAOMI GRAETZ	184
<i>Faust and the Human Condition: Duality and the Teaching of the Sages on the Two Spirits</i>	MORDECAI PALDIEL	193
<i>A Political Metaphor in Biblical and Rabbinic Literature</i>	MARTIN SICKER	208
<i>A Religious Argument for Welcoming Converts</i>	LAWRENCE J. EPSTEIN	215
<i>The String That Leads the Kite: Steven S. Schwarzschild's (1924-1989) View of Jewish Philosophy</i>	JOSÉ R. MAIA NETO	225
<i>Spinoza in History</i> Review-Essay on <i>Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason &amp; The Adventures of Immanence</i> (2 vols.) by Yirmiyahu Yovel	MICHAEL L. MORGAN	239
<i>White Flower (For Osip Mandelstam)</i> (poem)	JEREMY HARMAN	250
REVIEWS		
<i>Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism</i> by M. Herbert Danzger	LIVIA BITTON-JACKSON	251
<i>JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1888-1988</i> by Jonathan D. Sarna	MICHAEL N. DOBKOWSKI	252

*Editor Emeritus*  
ROBERT GORDIS

*Acting Editor*  
RUTH B. WAXMAN

*Assistant Editor*  
LIPPMAN BODOFF

*Contributing Editors*

ALEXANDER ALTMAN Waltham, Mass. • EUGENE B. BOROWITZ, New York, N.Y. • GERSON D. COHEN, New York, N.Y. • EMIL L. FACKENHEIM, Jerusalem, Israel • MICHAEL FISHBANE, Waltham, Mass. • DAVID FLUSSER, Jerusalem, Israel • MARVIN FOX, Waltham, Mass. • SOLOMON B. FREEHOF, Pittsburgh, Pa. • MAURICE FRIEDMAN, San Diego, Cal. • THEODORE FRIEDMAN, Jerusalem, Israel • JUDAH GOLDIN, Philadelphia, Pa. • MAX GRUENWALD, Millburn, N.J. • SUSAN HANDELMAN, College Park, Md. • MENAHEM HARAN, Jerusalem, Israel • ARTHUR HYMAN, New York, N.Y. • ERICH ISAAC, Irvington, N.Y. • MILTON R. KONVITZ, Ithaca, N.Y. • ARTHUR J. LELYVELD, Cleveland, Ohio • ANNE L. LERNER, New York, N.Y. • SOL LIPTZIN, Jerusalem, Israel • HARRY M. ORLINSKY, New York, N.Y. • JAKOB PETUCHOWSKI, Cincinnati, Ohio • LEO PFEFFER, New York, N.Y. • EMANUEL RACKMAN, New York, N.Y. • NATHAN ROTENSTREICH, Jerusalem, Israel • ZALMAN M. SCHACHTER, Philadelphia, Pa. • DAVID WOLF SILVERMAN, Oakhurst, N.J. • SHEMARYAHU TALMON, Jerusalem, Israel • DAVID WEISS, New York, N.Y. • PAUL WEISS, Washington, D.C. • MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD, New York, N.Y.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless — the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

*Judaism* will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

## *The First Reader*

### *Hollywood and TV Look at the Jews*

In an analysis of movies and TV shows that deal with intermarriage, *Robert Jancu* points out the extent to which the early films were much more reflections of their makers' own desire to assimilate than they were a reflection of the contemporary reality. In a period when the percentage of intermarriages was very low in actuality, it was extraordinarily high on the silver screen. To this day, being Jewish is generally deprecated on the screen, and almost no films deal with intra-Jewish marriage, although the original attitude of Jewish movie writers and producers, not to stand out ethnically, should no longer be present. The author contrasts this continuing attitude with the growing awareness and prideful presentation of Black identity, particularly on TV. "Jackie Mason's World According to Hollywood" alerts us to the skewed picture of Jews which comes out of, and is still coming out of, the entertainment industry.

### *A Jewish Pope?*

How much truth is there in legend? What keeps it alive? In the Middle Ages there was a well-known Jewish tale, that appeared in a variety of forms, that there had been a Jewish Pope. The very existence of such a narrative, let alone its popularity, would seem to indicate a kind of need by Jews to prove their continuing worth even during the worst of times, and that Jews could rise to the top, when special circumstances removed the ubiquitous barriers of Christendom. In each instance, the Jewish Pope's origins are unknown to him, but when he does discover them he recants and, in three versions of the story, he publicly commits suicide, out of loyalty to his people and remorse for his life as a Pope. In a fourth version, however, he secretly returns to his home town where he quietly lives out his days.

*David Levine Lerner* analyzes the various forms in which the story has come down to us, and includes, as well, a discussion of other improbable Popes — Pope Joan; a hasidic story about a Jewish Pope; and contemporary variants on that theme, one by Y.Y. Trunk and the other the story



by I.B. Singer, "Zydlus the First." "The Enduring Legend of the Jewish Pope" is a fascinating presentation of the will to believe the unbelievable.

### *The Rabbis and the Prophetesses*

Whenever the question of how the Bible treats women comes up, there is always the rush to point out that the matriarchs were as important as the patriarchs, and that the fragile existence of the Jewish people was firmed up by their advice and their insightful maneuvering. What is more, the gift of prophecy was also vouchsafed to women. *Leila J. Bronner* deals with seven of these personalities in "Biblical Prophetesses Through Rabbinic Eyes." True, they do not rank with either the Minor, let alone the Major, Prophets, who came much later, and all of whom were men, but each was significant in her lifetime and influenced the world about her.

When the Rabbis of the Talmud considered these women, they were generally laudatory, but the fact is that, given the opportunity, they sometimes included an anti-feminist derogatory remark. This was particularly true in the case of Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron. In "Miriam: Guilty Or Not Guilty?" *Naomi Graetz* raises questions about the subject of her paper, and shows us how the Rabbis accused Miriam of engaging in slander (*lashon ha-ra*) against Moses. As the author puts it, *lashon ha-ra* is character assassination, and when directed against a figure in authority it was considered even more serious. Therefore, though Miriam is a Prophetess, she is judged harshly, particularly in contrast to Aaron who was no less guilty, because she is a woman. That this attitude is still prevalent, is shown by Mrs. Graetz's reference to a contemporary commentator who is hardly even-handed when discussing the punishment of Aaron and Miriam when they spoke out against their brother.

### *We Are Not Single Human Beings*

The duality in human beings is not the discovery of modern psychology. It goes back to the origin of man, and the Rabbis epitomized it in two concepts, *Yezer Ha-ra* and *Yezer Ha-Tov*, the evil and good impulses, respectively.

In Goethe's *Faust*, the prototype of emerging modern Western Man, the striving for goals, for experience, for fulfillment, leads the protagonist to ally himself with Mephistopheles, the epitome of the *Yezer Ha-ra*. *Mordecai Paldiel* analyzes this alliance, occasionally even finding a good word for Mephistopheles as a goad to action. The Rabbis, too, had a similar occasional good word for the *Yezer Ha-ra*, for, without it, they said, little would be achieved in this world. "Faust and the Human Condition: Duality and the Teaching of the Sages on the Two Spirits," comes to the conclusion that, in our human duality, a proper balance should be the goal.

*Why Do We Need Government?*

"Is society without government conceivable?" asks *Martin Sicker*, author of "A Political Metaphor in Biblical and Rabbinic Literature." The answer is a resounding "NO", based on the oft-repeated rabbinic view that "were it not for fear of government, a man would swallow up his neighbor alive," and Jeremiah's injunction to "seek the peace of the city . . . for in the peace thereof ye shall have peace." These pessimistic (but realistic) views of human nature appear in a variety of statements in Jewish tradition, but most cogently in the metaphor, "as it is with the fishes of the sea, the one that is bigger swallows the other up, so with man . . ." The view is reiterated by rabbis as late as the end of the 19th century, making it a political view of man that has an astonishingly long Jewish history.

*We Should Open Our Arms*

Judaism was rarely known as a proselytizing religion, and would-be converts have always been initially discouraged. Only when the specific individuals showed an unremitting desire for Judaism, and an understanding and acceptance of the obligations that one assumes as a Jew, were they taken in. In "A Religious Argument for Welcoming Converts," *Lawrence J. Epstein* approaches the problem differently. Starting with the premise that Judaism is a universal religion because God is universal and His message, though first given to the Jews, is also universal, he proceeds to build a strong argument for changing past attitudes. In these days of a declining Jewish birthrate and high intermarriage, Prof. Epstein's views offer an interesting challenge and, perhaps, an effective stimulus to increasing the Jewish population.

*Flying High With Jewish Philosophy*

What is "Jewish philosophy?" Perhaps this is an oxymoron, in the sense that if it is Jewish it is — by definition — particular to the Jewish experience and, thus, cannot be the universal discipline implied by the term "philosophy," and if it is truly philosophy, it cannot be Jewish. In "The String that Leads the Kite: Steven S. Schwarzschild's (1924-1989) View of Jewish Philosophy," *José R. Maia Neto* addresses the problem through an analysis of the philosophy of his late teacher, who emphasizes that true philosophy deals with what is good or moral and not what is true, and that this approach was initiated by Jewish thought. In this sense, there can be a philosophy that is both Jewish and universal, which we should be proud to call "Jewish philosophy." Continuing the metaphor in the title of the paper, the author concludes that Jewish philosophy is the string that leads the kite of secular philosophy, and that "it is ultimately the philosopher that controls the kite by handling the string. It flies high in Schwarzschild's hands."

R.B.W.

# *Jackie Mason's World According to Hollywood\**

ROBERT JANCU

For Hollywood, tolerance means marrying your neighbor, not accepting him as different.  
— Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema*

“IF I WAS A GENTILE, I WOULDN’T HAVE TO listen to you,” Jackie Mason tells his oh-so Jewish mother on the first episode of ABC’s swifly cancelled 1989 sitcom, “Chicken Soup.” During this first show, Mr. Mason’s character Jacob (“Jackie”) Fisher is transformed into someone who no longer does listen to his mother and what she represents. Having dreamed that a terminal illness afflicts him, Jackie Fisher resolves to revitalize himself by taking his interfaith romance with Maddie Pearce, an Irish Catholic played by Lynn Redgrave, out of the closet. His passage through the symbolic death of the dream into “light” and “enlightenment” — as he terms his new outlook in a closing monologue — entails a confrontation with his mother in which he explicitly rejects the “5,000 years” of “tradition” that she asks him not to betray.

The show’s producers feared that Nielsen families might balk at “Chicken Soup”’s recipe for Jewish-Christian romance. “From the point of view of television programmers, few relationships could be riskier,” writes Steve Oney in a *New York Times* article, “Jackie Mason Stirs Up a Chancy ‘Chicken Soup.’” According to his research, “just once before has a network television show mined this material,” in the short-lived 1970’s sitcom, “Bridget Loves Bernie.”

Although both programs flopped, the reason cannot be that the depiction of interfaith dating on television is untried and controversial, for the converse is true. Almost without exception, Jews depicted on T.V. and in cinema, date and marry gentiles. Apparently, Hollywood finds interreligious romance *less* risky than romance between two Jewish characters. Hollywood’s unwritten prohibition against Jewish pairings — rather than its putative reservations about depicting interfaith romance — is the issue which should concern both Hollywood and the Jewish community.

---

\* The title refers to Jackie Mason’s one-man Broadway production, “Jackie Mason’s ‘The World According to Me.’”

---

ROBERT JANCU is a graduate student in philosophy at Stanford University.



Besides "Chicken Soup" and "Bridget Loves Bernie," T.V. history is rife with examples of interfaith couples, such as those featured on "Rhoda," "Welcome Back, Kotter," "Cheers" (Frazier and Lilith), "L.A. Law," "Thirtysomething," and "Roseanne." Incidental treatments of Jewish-Christian romance crop up all the time. In "Dear John," for instance, Judd Hirsch tries, along with his Christian ex-wife, to get their child enrolled in a Christian school, in order to make sure that "people would see it as a mixed marriage," according to the show's ex-producer, Peter Noah.

Made-for-T.V. films such as "Ellis Island" (1984) and "The Triangle Factory Fire Scandal" (1979) portray intermarriage for newly immigrant Jews as normative. Jewish characters who oppose the interfaith pairings argue only in reactionary terms, which frames apostasy from Judaism as progress. It is fortuitously appropriate on "Thirtysomething" — produced by Marshall Herskovitz and Edward Zwick, two Jews married to gentiles — that the Christian wife of the Jewish Michael Steadman is named "Hope."

Interfaith romance has always been a staple of the commercial cinema. Films representing it as a means of self-improvement for Jews number well over a hundred. Many of the most popular and critically acclaimed recent films highlight Jewish men chasing gentile women, including "Broadcast News" (1988), "Chariots of Fire" (1981), "Sophie's Choice" (1982), "Biloxi Blues" (1988), "The Big Chill" (1983), and all of those showcasing the misadventures of Woody Allen's stereotyped *shlemiels*. In some films, such as "Lovesick" (1983), "Soup for One" (1981), Woody Allen's "Stardust Memories" (1980), and his recent effort, "Crimes and Misdemeanors" (1989), nearly every character is Jewish except for the paramours of the Jewish protagonists.

Films which do depict Jews happily married to Jews, such as "Yentl" (1983) or "Fiddler on the Roof" (1971), portray a dead Jewish culture. Then there are all the Holocaust films which depict Jewish families, to be sure, but only as part of a Jewish culture in the process of dying. This fits with the sharp dichotomy in T.V. series and films between Jewishness as moribund baggage of the Old World, better left on the docks at Ellis Island, and assimilation as a new lease on life.<sup>1</sup>

A rare movie which depicts two contemporary New World Jews in love, "Crossing Delancey" (1988), is telling in this regard. Amy Irving consents to a relationship with a Jew only after her *bubba* drags her, practically kicking and screaming, away from what is portrayed as her

1. This is evident even in the way Scholem Aleichem's *Tevey der Milkhiker* was adapted for an American audience by Joseph Stein as *Fiddler on the Roof*. In the original *Tevey*, the intermarried daughter Chava intends to leave her Christian husband to join her father's wanderings after the eviction of Jews from Anatevka. In Stein's version, tailored to an audience of American Jews, however, Chava makes no offer to accompany her father, and moves instead with her Christian husband to Warsaw.

liberated, modern lifestyle and back into a Lower East Side where Jews sell pickles, employ matchmakers, and live in a hermetic, Old World environment. In the film, being Jewish means crossing a boundary into a realm dissociated from the New York of the present. Hollywood tells us that Jews living as Jews and marrying Jews exist only in the pre-Holocaust European past or in a veritable regression into such a past.

Occasionally tired of trotting out the story line of Jewish boy meets gentile girl,<sup>2</sup> Hollywood presents the Jew as chronically single or, sometimes, as married to a Jew, but the relationship is either marginal to the story or so unpleasant that Christian lovers are soon preferred. Though not every Jew depicted by Hollywood is involved with a gentile, every healthy Jewish relationship on which a program focuses is inter-religious. It is the axiom of the Jew according to Hollywood: in any film or T.V. series which depicts contemporary life — not a nostalgic glimpse of the *shtetl* or of Jews acting as if they want to go back there — and in which the plot centers around a positive, romantic relationship in which one of the partners is a Jew, the other partner is a gentile.

This ironclad axiom is so deeply ingrained in Hollywood that it is transparent even to the trained eyes of entertainment media analysts like Steve Oney, who still worry that the public is not ready for the depiction of a Jew dating a gentile. Recently, it was invisible also to Stanley Kauffmann, reviewing “When Harry Met Sally” (1989) for *The New Republic*. He finds the film’s complete indifference to religion in an interfaith romance a refreshing sign of progress in cinematic conventions: a sign that “prejudice against Jewish leading men” has finally been “pretty well demolished.” The critic fails to see that had the Jewish protagonist, played by Billy Crystal, chosen a Jewish lover, *this* would have been the cinematic novelty. To understand how the axiom became so prevalent as to be transparent, one must examine Jewish involvement in Hollywood and the larger context of post-Emancipation Jewish history.

It is no secret that Jews “invented Hollywood,” as the subtitle of Neal Gabler’s recent study on the topic phrases it (*An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*). Apparently, portraying American life on the silver screen, on the stage, or on T.V., is a passion which originally came most naturally to newly immigrant Jews. Driven by the memory of pariah status in Europe, they eagerly pioneered film as a medium through which to fantasize out loud, to create a vision of Amer-

2. It is interesting to note that, in the vast majority of Hollywood’s depictions of Jewish-Christian romance, it is Jewish boys who meet Christian girls, and not Christian boys who meet Jewish girls. In reality, 45% of all current Jewish-Christian marriages are between Jewish women and Christian men. One possible explanation for the discrepancy between gender distributions in Hollywood’s couplings and in reality is that, in a sexist society, it might be unacceptably demeaning for the male of the dominant culture to be portrayed as falling for a woman of an out-group.

ica in which they felt at home. Gabler explains that Protestants could probably not have invented the film industry, for they "would have needed the same desperate longing for security that Mayer and so many of the other Hollywood Jews felt. One would have had to suffer the same compulsion to merge oneself with the world."<sup>3</sup> As Molly Haskell notes in her review of Gabler's book, film offered Jews the opportunity to project to the "American Cossacks outside the industry"<sup>4</sup> certain key ideas: "an America in which social divisions could be closed, the rich could learn humility, the poor could rise, the illiterate could acquire knowledge" and, most of all, "Jews could become unhyphenated Americans."<sup>5</sup>

The original moguls created a Hollywood in their own image, and this image in turn had been created by their common experience fleeing the pogroms and poverty of eastern Europe. A. Scott Berg chronicles this in his recently published *Goldwyn: A Biography*:

In the 1880's alone, the family of Louis B. Mayer left Demre, near Vilna in Lithuania; Lewis Zeleznick (later Selznick) ran away from Kiev; William Fox (formerly Fuchs) emigrated from Tulcheva, Hungary; the Warner family uprooted itself from Krasnashiltz, Poland, near the Russian border; Adolph Zukor abandoned Ricse, Hungary; and Carl Laemmle left Württemberg, Germany.<sup>6</sup>

A decade later, in 1895, Schmuel Gelbfisz deserted his Hasidic family in Warsaw; in the U.S., he changed his name to Sam Goldwyn, married a gentile, and baptized their child. Many other moguls, such as Mayer, Selznick, Harry Cohn, Otto Preminger, and Jack Warner, divorced their Jewish wives and married gentiles.

It is hardly accidental that Hollywood's first talkie, "The Jazz Singer," produced by the Warner Brothers in 1927, told the story of a Jew renouncing his people and religion to succeed in the entertainment industry and marry a Christian woman.<sup>7</sup> In her exhaustive study, *The Jew in American Cinema*, Patricia Erens argues that Hollywood's "bias toward resolving scenarios with intermarriage" is its favorite "happy ending" because it "reflected events in [the Jewish producers'] own biographies." In the first two decades of this century, when intermarriage between Jews and gentiles hardly exceeded 1% of all Jewish marriages, Erens continues, "what is interesting is the quickness with which the

3. Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Anchor, 1989), p. 119.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 320.

5. Molly Haskell, "Epic! Heroic! American!", *New York Times Book Review* (Oct. 23, 1988): 1.

6. A. Scott Berg, *Goldwyn: A Biography* (New York: Ballantine, 1989), pp. 8-9.

7. The non-Hollywood Yiddish film industry responded to "The Jazz Singer" with the 1937 film, "The Cantor's Son." The story is nearly identical except for the ending: the renegade cantor's son achieves fame as a jazz singer, but ultimately rejects the fully assimilated lifestyle, succeeds his father as cantor, and marries a Jewish girl.

approbation of intermarriage becomes a dominant theme in Hollywood film.”<sup>8</sup>

A dominant theme indeed, since screen Jews romance or marry gentiles in an astonishing number of the very earliest films. These include “Leah, the Forsaken” (1908), “Russia, the Land of Oppression” (1910), “In the Czar’s Name” (1910), “Becky Gets a Husband” (1912), “The Peddler’s Find” (1912), “The Jew’s Christmas” (1913), “The Black 107” (1913), “Unto the Third Generation” (1913), “The Pawnbroker’s Daughter” (1913), “Business and Love” (1914), “Threads of Destiny” (1914), “Deborah” (1914), “The Faith of Her Fathers” (1914), the similarly entitled “Faith of Her Fathers” (1915), “The Melting Pot” (1915), “The Barrier of Faith” (1915), “The Yellow Ticket” (1918), “Broken Barriers” (1919), Charlie Chaplin’s “Sunnyside” (1919), and many others.

In some of these pictures which re-enact Russian pogroms, the gentile lover saves the Jewish partner, “while no Jewish heroes arose to save their own people in the films of this genre,” according to Erens.<sup>9</sup> The belief that only assimilation with Christians will save Jews from Christians<sup>10</sup> resonates in the early films depicting intermarriage in America. Socio-economic mobility, these films explain, depends primarily on marriage outside the Jewish faith: this, at a time when practically the only Jews who actually married gentiles were the filmmakers themselves.

In order to erase traces of the heavy Jewish involvement in the film industry, the moguls insisted that their Jewish actors and actresses anglicize their names. Gary Carey’s biography of Louis B. Mayer alleges that the moguls even tried to issue medical proof “that certain suspect actors were uncircumcised.”<sup>11</sup> Eagerness to have done with their origins manifested itself in all manner of ways; the wife of one mogul treated a daughter’s skin with bleach and her hair with lemon and eggs in order to blanch them.<sup>12</sup>

Witnessing all this during his half-century tenure as rabbi of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Beverly Hills, Edgar F. Magnin noted that what motivated Jews to create Hollywood also motivated them to adore gentile women:

8. Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 47, 74, 77.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

10. The epic mini-series, “War and Remembrance” (1989), based on the novel by Herman Wouk, rehashes this theme, as Aaron Jastrow reaffirms his Jewish identity only to be gassed in Birkenau, while his niece, Natalie, is wedded to an American gentile able to lobby for her rescue with F.D.R. himself through his powerful old-boy network and W.A.S.P. family connections. She survives Birkenau.

11. Gary Carey, *All the Stars in Heaven: Louis B. Mayer’s MGM* (New York: Dutton, 1981), p. 246.

12. A. Scott Berg, *Goldwyn*, p. 164.

They were men who made all that money and realized that they were still a bunch of Goddamned Jews... Sleeping with a pretty gentile girl made them feel, if only for a few minutes, "I'm half Gentile." No wonder they made idols out of *shiksa* goddesses.<sup>13</sup>

It is also possible that Hollywood attracted those Jews most anxious to shed their identities, since it offered ready means for individuals to transform themselves into "mere" Americans, and to transform America by projecting what Molly Haskell calls "a more cosmopolitan version of the American dream than anything that might have been concocted by a purebred native industry."<sup>14</sup> For Jews who were comfortable with remaining somewhat outside the American mainstream, Hollywood exerted less gravity. Thus, Hollywood attracted not just a high concentration of Jews, but also a certain type of Jew. As a result, the traditional version of the Jew depicted by Hollywood is the distinctly non-traditional Jew, the Jew becoming non-Jew.

Jews flocked to T.V. production for the same reasons. Nearly three out of five T.V. executives are Jews, a percentage almost as high as in the film industry, according to political scientists Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter.<sup>15</sup> Philosopher-historian Isaiah Berlin analyzed the affinity Jews feel for the arts and entertainment industry: as perpetual "strangers," Jews "become primary authorities on the natives" in order to devise strategies for their survival and, hopefully, for acceptance. As a by-product of their expertise, Jews "interpret the native society to the outside world," since they are the ones who have taken pains to "codify [the natives'] language and customs."<sup>16</sup>

This explains not only why Jews, more than Protestants, flooded Hollywood, but also why Jews more than other contingents of new immigrants applied themselves to rehearsing America on screen and stage. Although Italians, Irish, Slavs, and others, felt more dissonance than Jews upon arrival on these shores — after all, they had not been an out-group before, and many returned home to Europe — such immigrants were not as practiced in the art of translating the dissonance of alienation into techniques for coping.

What this does not explain, however, is why the Jewish moguls

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

14. Haskell, *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

15. Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter, "What Are Movie-Makers Made Of?" *Public Opinion*, Vol. 6, No. 6 (Dec./Jan. 1984): 14-18; Linda S. Lichter, S. Robert Lichter, and Stanley Rothman, "Hollywood and America: The Odd Couple," *Public Opinion*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (Dec./Jan. 1983): 54-58. Their polls indicate that 62% of the elite executives in filmmaking and 59% in T.V. are Jews. Jewish representation in Hollywood has held remarkably steady at 62%; *Fortune* magazine reported in 1936 that, "Of 85 names engaged in [film] production, 53 are Jews," in *Jews in America*, editors of *Fortune* (New York, Feb. 1936): 61.

16. Isaiah Berlin, *Jewish Slavery and Emancipation*, Herzl Institute Pamphlet No. 18 (New York: Herzl Press, 1961), p. 8.



made films in which Jewish characters jettisoned their backgrounds completely. If a goal of their films was to pluralize society, why did the moguls not depict Jews as different than, but compatible with, a tolerant gentile society? A comparison with the experience of Blacks in film and T.V. is instructive.

Throughout the early era of film, Blacks had cameo roles as slaves or hired domestics. When sustained Black characters emerged on television in the 1970's, at first they continued in such roles, but, by the 1980's, self-conscious Black producers and artists began to challenge such demeaning depictions. Bill Cosby, of course, has led the way on television, while Spike Lee has led the way, with mixed results, in film. Both have made the point that Black characters formerly appeared only in shows primarily about whites, as if Blacks existed only insofar as they impinged on the lives of the white characters.

In recent T.V. shows like "Amen," "A Different World," "227," "Family Matters," or "The Cosby Show," as in films such as Spike Lee's "School Daze" and "She's Gotta Have It," Black lives are not overdetermined by the sheer fact of their blackness or their relations to whites. Black issues do exercise the characters, but so do human issues. Taking control of their image in entertainment, Black producers communicate that the lives of minorities have value and integrity when detached from immediate contact with whites.

Today's Black producers, like Jewish producers since the dawn of Hollywood, attempt to transform American society by reflecting it back a little more open to differences. However, there is quite a divide between the differences that Black and Jewish producers ask America to tolerate. Bill Cosby and Spike Lee see no reason why a Black communal structure cannot coexist next to other such structures, all of which participate as partners, respectful of each other's differences, in a knitted American community.

On the other hand, producers of shows with Jewish characters, like Saul Turtelraub and Norman Orenstein of "Chicken Soup," ask gentile Americans to be tolerant of Jews in order that Jews may marry them and terminate the differences. During the 1989 T.V. season, as we watched Lisa Bonet return from volunteer work in Africa to marry a Black U.S. naval officer on "The Cosby Show" — a perfect blending of Old and New Worlds from which Blacks can draw strength — we also watched the embarrassing spectacle of Jackie Mason finding Jewish life in America to be an anachronism.

It is not possible, therefore, to account entirely for Hollywood's image of ever-assimilating Jews by citing Jewish moguls' experience as members of an out-group in American society, for other out-groups demonstrate no comparable impatience to vanish. Instead, other groups have used entertainment media to reinforce their cultural identities. One must consider what uniquely separates Jewish experience not just

from that of Italian, Irish, and other European immigrants, but from Black, Hispanic, and Oriental immigrants as well. In short, what propels Jews, in such disproportionate numbers, to positions in the entertainment industry from which they keep reissuing wedding invitations, marrying Jews off to gentiles one show at a time?

Jackie Mason's character on "Chicken Soup" traces its lineage to the debate in the National Assembly of revolutionary France on whether or not to extend citizenship to Jews. The Count Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre proposed in December, 1789: "To the Jews as a nation, nothing; to the Jews as individuals, everything." Before this, Jews had no choice other than confinement in the ghetto. Now, gentile society beckoned to them, if only they would lay aside their particularity. In 1807, Napoleon convened the first Great Sanhedrin since the destruction of the Second Temple, 1,800 years earlier. His purpose was to have the rabbis declare Jews to be co-religionists rather than co-nationals, as a condition of awarding Jews full benefits of citizenship. Right up through 1870, every major declaration of Jewish emancipation was accompanied by this disclaimer.

As a result, many Jews who chose the gentile world over the Jewish ghetto developed an acute ambivalence toward their Jewish identities. And this ambivalence, even self-hatred, transported itself efficiently to America. Jews who lived here prior to the great eastern European migrations had already established a precedent of massive assimilation. The earliest American Jews were Sephardic, many of whom retained certain habits of the Marranos, those Spanish and Portuguese Jews who had been forced by the Inquisition to renounce Judaism publicly, yet who continued to practice Judaism privately. The less the outside world knew of their Jewishness, they thought, the better.

The German Jewish influx in the mid-nineteenth century planted an attenuated Reform Judaism in the less than fecund soil provided by the descendants of Marranos. As a result, as early as 1820, Jews began predicting the disappearance of American Jewry; in that year, one Joseph Lyons of Savannah, Georgia, complained that "certainly a synagogue . . . will not be found in the U.S. fifty years hence."<sup>17</sup>

The ethos of inconspicuousness in American Jewish life was abrogated by the arrival of East European immigrants, but not for long. After the first generation, itself comprised of Jews less pious in general than those who stayed behind, religious adherence declined precipitously. The forces diminishing outward signs of Jewishness in previous waves of immigration kicked in once again. "What made Jews different from other [immigrant] groups was, in part, the degree to which Jewish parents accepted — indeed, encouraged — the process" of assimilation,

17. Jacob R. Marcus, *Memoirs of American Jews, 1775-1865* (3 Vols., Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), Vol. I, p. 247.

Charles Silberman writes in his chronicle of America Jewry, *A Certain People*.<sup>18</sup>

Like Europe since the Emancipation, gentile America had difficulty accepting Jews as Jews, but might suffer them if they gave up their particularity. And this "seduction, not rape," as former *Moment* magazine editor Leonard Fein has put it, has become what "we [Jews] fear the most."<sup>19</sup> In the first half of this century, it convinced most Jews that abandoning all outward signs of religious and cultural solidarity was a fair price to pay for admission to gentile society. In *Commentary* magazine, Harvard sociologist Daniel Bell has described this as the "double burden and the double pleasure of [his] self-consciousness, the outward life of an American and the inward secret of the Jew."<sup>20</sup>

America's foremost sociologists reinforced this throughout the early twentieth century by insisting that anti-Semitism would not abate unless Jews concealed their Jewishness. The chief research psychologist of the Menninger Clinic, J.F. Brown, advised in 1942 that "responsible" Jewish leaders urge "immediate cultural and final racial assimilation," since "the celebration of the chief feasts, especially the Sabbath . . . prohibitions regarding diet; the facades of synagogues — all mark the Jew out" and, "by emphasizing the different culture of the Jew, enhance anti-Semitism."<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Talcott Parsons, the doyen of American sociology, concluded the same year that "*any* policy which tends to make Jews as Jews more conspicuous . . . would be an invitation to anti-Semitic reaction"<sup>22</sup> (*italics mine*). Many Jewish intellectuals agreed. In his 1932 work, *Jews on Approval*, Maurice Samuel noted that if Jews were "unobtrusive in their comings and goings, and above all reticent about their Jewishness, they would get along very well."<sup>23</sup>

These currents impacted a Hollywood already reticent about Jewishness. In 1940, Joseph P. Kennedy addressed a group of Jewish film moguls, Goldwyn among them, at a luncheon. Concerned that Hollywood might spread the notion that the Allied war effort was undertaken on behalf of European Jews, Kennedy admonished the filmmakers to "[s]top making anti-Nazi pictures" and stop "using the film medium to promote or show sympathy to the cause of the 'democracies' versus

18. Charles E. Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today* (New York: Summit, 1985), p. 62.

19. Leonard Fein, "The Jewish Community of the 1980's," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. LVII, No. 1 (Fall 1980): 12.

20. Daniel Bell, "Reflections on Jewish Identity," *Commentary*, Vol. 31, No. 6 (June 1961): 477.

21. J.F. Brown, "The Origin of the Anti-Semitic Attitude," in Isaacque Graeber and Stuart Henderson Britt, eds., *Jews in a Gentile World* (New York: Macmillan, 1942), Pt. II, Ch. 5, pp. 146, 134.

22. Talcott Parsons, "The Sociology of Modern Anti-Semitism," *Ibid.*, Pt. II, Ch. 4, p. 121.

23. Maurice Samuel, *Jews on Approval* (New York: Liveright, 1932), p. 10.

the 'dictators.'" At the very least, he continued, "you're going to have to get those Jewish names off the screen." The moguls did not object.<sup>24</sup>

They did not, in part, because signals sent out by Washington were equally hostile. Senator Gerald Nye declared in 1941 that Jewish film producers were "men [who] in time of world upset are susceptible to riotous and inflammable national and racial emotions."<sup>25</sup> In fact, the pressure began to mount in 1933, as soon as Hitler came to power, for politicians did not want Hollywood's Jews to goad America into an unwanted war. Consequently, from 1933 on, the screen Jew is denatured; in films made from novels about Jews and remakes of earlier films about Jews, surnames have been anglicized and references to Jewish ethnicity dropped. By 1945, Hollywood attorney Martin Gang asserts, Jewish producers had made their films "*judenrein*."<sup>26</sup>

It is significant that the first films of the immediate post-war years which condemn anti-Semitism — "Crossfire" (1947) and "Gentleman's Agreement" (1947) — were conceived and produced by non-Jews, and became targets of Jewish groups afraid that denouncing anti-Semitism would only stoke it.<sup>27</sup> Anticipating such criticisms, Darryl Zanuck, the Christian producer of "Gentleman's Agreement," included a Jewish character who, pathetically, voices this fear. The character, Irving Wiseman, says, "let it alone. It will only stir it up again. You can't write it out of existence." Even the Holocaust, at least for a few years, could not move the Jewish producers to defend Jews, still fearful that any conspicuousness would only worsen their lot.

This helps explain why the entertainment industry's image of the ever-assimilating Jew is not based on any commercial exigency, such as a calculation that gentile audiences are uninterested in seeing Jews marry Jews. While it may be true that gentiles prior to the 1950's might have had little interest in Jews except insofar as they entered into their own lives, as in a Jewish boy coming to marry a daughter, it does not explain why today's Hollywood, more than ever, continues to send up this image. In fact, it hardly explains it even for the period before the 1950's. The example of Black producers disabuses us of this. Black producers changed the image of Blacks as soon as they ascended to executive positions and had the capacity to project the images they wanted: positive images in order to counter racism. Thankfully, they do not pander to racism — for commercial or any other reasons — by

24. A. Scott Berg, *Goldwyn*, p. 346.

25. Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Viking, 1980), p. 109.

26. Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*, p. 302; in addition, David Wyman writes, "During the war . . . [d]espite extensive Jewish influence in the movie industry, the American Jewish Congress was unable to persuade anyone to produce even a short film on the mass killing of the Jews," in *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), p. 322.

27. Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema*, pp. 174-179.

producing only those scripts in which the black is peripheral, implying a white perspective.

Concentrating on Black family life to show that Black culture is worth preserving, the new Black productions make white audiences adjust to these images, not vice-versa. Whether such portrayals will curtail racism, only time will tell, but it can no longer be argued that such shows are not commercially viable. Even in South Africa, "The Cosby Show" consistently ranks first in the ratings. Jewish executives, however, numerous enough in the entertainment industry to set a standard which gentile executives would follow,<sup>28</sup> have not progressed past "The Jazz Singer." As if to emphasize that this film continues to be as relevant as it was in 1927, Hollywood produced it again in 1953, and a third time in 1980 starring Neil Diamond.

The difference in the kind of racism directed against Jews and that directed against Blacks accounts for the disparity in their general approaches to self-portrayal in Hollywood. After their emancipation in the U.S. Civil War, Blacks were not forced or even encouraged to intermarry or to dispense with every last trace of Afro-American culture as the price for their social and economic integration, whereas Jews were exhorted to intermarry and give up virtually all remnants of their culture as the very terms of their emancipation. While whites kept Blacks segregated because they still despised them, gentiles sought to absorb Jews and eradicate them — in some cases, perhaps, precisely because they despised them: the cases are more or less inversely analogous in this manner.

Once Blacks assumed some control over entertainment media, the characterization of independent Black family life was something that whites were already willing to grant. Even though it marked a break with racist depictions of individual Blacks as subordinate appendages to white families, whites sanctioned the maintenance of a separate cultural sensibility. For Jews, however, the idea of a separate cultural identity has been viewed as a Damocles sword hanging over their heads, threatening total disenfranchisement, thanks to Clermont-Tonnerre and his latter-day ilk. Jews have been conflicted as to what is in their best interest; like Hollywood's moguls, all Jews have had to choose whether to act in their best interest as individual humans or as members of a Jewish collective.

28. Prime examples of the way Jewish writers and producers themselves foster the paradigm of interfaith romance for Jewish characters involve the soap operas "Ryan's Hope," "General Hospital," and "Days of Our Lives." The interfaith romances featured on the two latter programs were scripted by Leah Laiman, daughter of Orthodox Jews. And only "Days of Our Lives" retained the interfaith romance as a long-running subplot because, Laiman says, "there are Jews at the helm of 'Days,'" whereas the Catholics who produce the other two soaps that feature interreligious affairs were not interested in prolonging the story. See Mark C. Guncheon, "Between Commercials, The Jews," *Moment*, Vol. 11, No. 9 (Dec. 1986): 43-47.



However, the historical circumstances which so sharply differentiated the Black and Jewish postures in Hollywood have changed. News of the Holocaust mitigated American anti-Semitism, as did the gentile experience of fighting alongside American Jews during the war. In 1944, 24% of polled gentiles considered Jews "a menace to America," but by 1950, the figure had dropped to 5%. Once the Depression was over, growing prosperity ended the type of situation in which gentiles, in fierce competition for scarce jobs and resources, traditionally scapegoated Jews. Also, the post-war market economy expanded rapidly enough to create a need for labor and expertise from any available quarter; discrimination against Jews in employment fell accordingly.

American society itself became more and more secularized. The 1931 Supreme Court opinion that Americans are a Christian people, quickly seemed obsolete. And the establishment of the State of Israel, accentuated by its stunning six-day victory in 1967, fundamentally altered the way that both Jews and gentiles perceived Jews: no longer, as a group, wanderers by necessity, inhabiting a "host" country by sufferance, Jews were now immigrants entitled by choice to their own community and culture, like other Americans.

As Hollywood nevertheless continued to crank out more pictures and T.V. series about Jews casting off their "5,000 years" of "tradition," reverberations of post-war events transformed Jews in all other walks of American life. In academia, for instance, Harry Austryn Wolfson, the first to hold Harvard's chair of Judaic Studies, had counselled in 1922 that Jews reconcile themselves to being "deprived of many social goods and advantages," since to be Jewish in America was one of those "problems of life for which no solution is possible."<sup>29</sup> A half century later, in 1979, the Dean of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Henry Rosovsky, carried a Torah scroll across Harvard Yard as he led a procession to mark the opening of the university's new Hillel offices. Rosovsky addressed the audience:

Today, Hillel is moving from the periphery of campus to its very center.... Let it be said that [after World War Two] Harvard welcomed us with open arms, as students and teachers.... What is perhaps more remarkable is that we have succeeded in transforming ourselves from a group of individuals into a community; that is really what is being celebrated here today.<sup>30</sup>

His remarks are an obituary for the era of Clermont-Tonnerre. No longer need American Jews decide between remaining Jews or becoming Americans, between a deprivation of "social goods and advantages" as a community, and access to these amenities as individuals.

29. Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Escaping Judaism*, Menorah Society Pamphlet No. 2 (New York: Menorah Press, 1922), pp. 1, 50-51.

30. From the text of the speech in Dean Henry Rosovsky, "Then and Now: The Jewish Experience at Harvard," *Moment*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (June 1980): 20, 24.

Many Jews might nonetheless fear that the depiction of intra-Jewish couplings would provoke the old controversies about clannishness and claims to chosenness. This would merit concern, however, only if such all-Jewish couplings became as exclusive a version of the Jew as Hollywood's present depiction is monolithic. The characterization of any population should attempt a balance which is as close to that which actually obtains. Otherwise, the characterization is a stereotype. The axiom of the Jew according to Hollywood is, potentially, as damaging a stereotype as that of clannishness for which it overcompensates. The post-war social equilibrium which permits Jews a choice, free of anxiety, between marriage within or without the faith, is upset by Hollywood's ever-intermarrying Jew, and the uniform denigration of Jewish relationships voiced by Jewish characters can eventually lead to gentile feelings of anti-Semitism.

For example, "Marjorie Morningstar" (1958), "Goodbye Columbus" (1969), and "Down and Out in Beverly Hills" (1986), portray Jewish relationships as mutually destructive. "Enter Laughing" (1967) teaches that young Jews reject relationships with other Jews because they remind them of the hideous marriages of their parents. A Jewish girl in "The Last Embrace" (1979) seeks Jewish boyfriends only because she wants to kill Jewish men. In "The Heartbreak Kid" (1972), the new Jewish bride is so repugnant that her Jewish husband runs away with a gentile during their honeymoon. Both Goldie Hawn in "Private Benjamin" (1980) and Peter Sellers in "I Love You, Alice B. Toklas!" (1968) abandon their unappealing Jewish fiancées at the *huppah* in order to pursue relationships with gentiles. In all of these films, there is something indecorous or worse about Jewish intimacy.

"Goodbye Columbus" is rare in that it actually depicts a Jewish wedding, but editor Ralph Rosenblum and director Larry Peerce, both Jews, manipulate the wedding scene with unflattering camera angles and tendentious editing until the scene is grotesque. Rosenblum later said that they did this to get back at "the offensive relatives that had at one time or another made us ashamed to be Jewish."<sup>31</sup> Both he and Peerce belatedly realized that their editorial vituperation against Jewish weddings was anti-Semitic: "'My God,' we thought. 'What have we done?'"<sup>32</sup> If a Jewish wedding cannot be averted, directors and editors insinuate, then they feel it their duty to show why Jewish weddings ought to be averted. Such caricatures, when not counterbalanced by positive renderings of Jewish relationships, can only serve to incite the anti-Jewish antipathy which the filmmakers purport to relieve.

Film historian Patricia Erens finds it

31. Ralph Rosenblum and Robert Karen, *When the Shooting Stops . . . The Cutting Begins* (New York: Viking, 1979), p. 220.

32. *Ibid.*

unfortunate that there are no dramas about contemporary Jewish life that treat Judaism as a viable and positive force. Those films which deal with it in an overt way tend to be comedies that trivialize and ridicule Jewish customs in a self-conscious manner. . . . It is this aspect which has led many Jewish observers to question whether or not these films and their Jewish producers, writers, directors and actors are not perpetrating a form of Jewish anti-Semitism.<sup>33</sup>

Not just Judaism, but all facets of Jewish life appear sorry in film and television, a problem "compounded by the authenticity it seemingly implies through having been conceived and proffered by the Jew himself," as Owen Rachleff writes in *Midstream*.<sup>34</sup>

The sole Jewish role model that Hollywood offers young Jews — that of the apostate who intermarries — is a throwback to a time when Jews faced marginalization if they resisted full assimilation. Kafka's generalization, made in reference to Heine, that ambivalence toward Jewish identity is the essential Jewish trait, no longer holds. American Jews today feel less ambivalent about their identity than at any time in the past two centuries. Lagging behind the new American Jewish consensus, Jewish producers must decide whether or not to ratify this reaffirmation of identity, as Black producers do for their community.<sup>35</sup>

In 1948, sociologist Robert K. Merton wrote, "[i]f the Jew is condemned for his educational or professional or scientific or economic success, then, understandably enough, many Jews will come to feel that these accomplishments must be minimized in simple self-defense."<sup>36</sup> The greatest Jewish success of all is the survival of the Jewish people these many millenia. After Clermont-Tonnerre's ultimatum, however, Jews sought to downplay that success, or sometimes even to undo it themselves, "in simple self-defense." Hollywood became an effective bullhorn to broadcast Jewish acceptance of the terms of their emancipation. Perhaps it might now agree to depict Jews emancipated from the terms of the old contract.

33. Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema*, p. 285.

34. Owen Rachleff, "Jewish Comics," *Midstream*, Vol. XXII, No. 4 (April 1976): 55.

35. It might encourage Jewish producers to heed the example of Black producers if reminded of the first time in film history that Jews wisely followed the lead of Blacks: the NAACP's protests against D.W. Griffith's racist film "Birth of Nation" (1915) inspired B'nai B'rith the next year to pressure Griffith to remove the anti-Semitic scenes from "Intolerance" (1916) and to begin monitoring films in case of offensive content.

36. Robert K. Merton, "The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy," in his *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), p. 486.

# *The Enduring Legend of the Jewish Pope*

DAVID LEVINE LERNER

... I tremble for that artless boy, whom flattery or  
fraud,  
May lead to offer sacrifice to the oppressor's God!  
I tremble for the innocent, whose reason scarce  
awake,  
May the wily tempter's words, for those of truth  
mistake  
Oh! Rather let him perish, like the martyrs of the  
past,  
Than incense on the altar of idolatry to cast...<sup>1</sup>

THE LEGEND OF THE JEWISH POPE WAS A popular medieval Jewish tale. In it, the young son of a noted rabbi is kidnapped, forcibly baptized, and enrolled in a seminary to study for the priesthood. The boy, a brilliant student, quickly ascends in the Church hierarchy, eventually being elected Pope. Remembering (or discovering) his origins, the Pontiff has an emotional reunion with his aged father, who is both elated that his son is alive, and aghast to learn what has become of him. The Pope asks his father for a penance by which he may atone for his apostasy, and the rabbi hints at martyrdom. Following the meeting, the Pope publicly proclaims his faith in the God of his ancestors, and thereupon commits suicide. In a later version, the Pope disappears mysteriously from the Vatican and returns home, where he resumes his place as the rabbi's long-lost son.

Surprisingly, this tale has remained popular, and has been retold well into the twentieth century, even appearing in modern Jewish children's storybooks. A close examination of the legend reveals that it incorporates motifs familiar to Jews under Christian rule in Europe. The feeling of powerlessness to oppose a hostile Church was reinforced for centuries by repeated acts of anti-Semitic oppression that were sanctioned or tolerated by the Church; kidnappings, forced conversions, and martyrdom were realities of Jewish life in Europe for generations. Drawing on the long experience as an oppressed minority, beginning with their Biblical sojourn in Egypt, the Jews created a legend that the enemy's greatest leader was actually a former Jew who might be convinced to return to the fold. This defiant story expresses the confidence of medieval Jewry both in the ul-

1. From "Tribute of Condolence" (1858), by Penina Moïse, in Bertram W[allace] Korn, *The American Reaction to the Mortara Case: 1958-1959* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1957), p. 163.

---

DAVID LEVINE LERNER, a medical student at the University of Miami, studied Jewish folklore at Harvard University.

imate truth of Judaism and in the Jews' potential for success in the Gentile world but for their loyalty to their own faith.

The Jewish Pope legend may have some historical basis, but it is elaborated upon considerably, with motifs drawn from the rich Jewish tradition and from the realities of European Jewish life. The legend was kept alive and popular for many centuries by its continued relevance to the Jews' difficult lives, and gradually assumed a structure similar in some respects to the folktales of their European neighbors. Like many other European folktales, the legend, in its most optimistic version, has today become a children's story.

# I

The legend of the Jewish Pope survives in at least four versions, three of which are preserved in Hebrew manuscripts. Avraham David has compared the details of the three manuscript versions and the later Yiddish one.<sup>2</sup> One manuscript contains an Ashkenazic version of the legend, in which the kidnapped child is identified as Elhanan, son of R. Shim'on the Great of Mayence, a liturgical poet born c.950. In two Sephardic manuscripts, the boy is the son of R. Shlomo ibn Aderet of Barcelona, known as the Rashba (c. 1235-1310). The Ashkenazic manuscript and one of the Sephardic ones relate a condensed version of the story, consisting only of the essential details, while the second Sephardic version relates a longer, more elaborate version.

A longer Ashkenazic version of the legend, in Yiddish, also survives; it is, in fact, the best-known version of the story today, and has often been retold. This version was first published in the *Mayse-Bukh*, or *Book of Tales*, a collection of Talmudic and later Jewish stories originally printed sometime between 1580 and 1602.<sup>3</sup> The publication of this book has been called "a great literary event, one of the major milestones in Old-Yiddish literature."<sup>4</sup> It was reprinted and circulated in Europe for centuries, influencing both the content and the style of later works, and the longevity of our legend is probably due to the importance of the *Mayse-Bukh* for both the oral and written literature of northern European Jewry. Although the book was clearly edited from existing source material, many of the stories were augmented with motifs borrowed from European folklore, or transcribed from an oral tradition.<sup>5</sup> In comparison to earlier Jewish versions of the material, many stories in the *Mayse-Bukh* have "grad-

2. Avraham David, "*Beirurim be-Inyanah Shel Aggadat ha-Afifyor ha-Yehudi*," *Yad le-Heiman* (Lod: Habermann Institute, 1983), pp. 19-25.

3. H.G. Enelow, "Andreas," *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901), 1: 579; Israel Zinberg, *Old-Yiddish Literature from its Origins to the Haskalah Period*, vol. 7 of *A History of Jewish Literature*, trans. and ed. Bernard Martin (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press; New York: KTAV, 1975), pp. 185-6.

4. Zinberg, p. 197.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 187.



ually changed and grow[n] through the addition of new details;”<sup>6</sup> such is certainly the case with the book’s version of the Jewish Pope legend.

A comparison of the four versions of the Jewish Pope legend will demonstrate the adaptation of the story, not only to different locations and characters, but to the different circumstances of Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jewish life.

### 1. *Short Ashkenazic Version (SAV)*<sup>7</sup>

In the short Ashkenazic version, the legend is tantalizingly simple. The bare facts of the story are tersely presented in a Hebrew peppered with Biblical phrases, especially those reminiscent of the story of Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 37-47). In only ten words, this version describes Elhanan’s kidnapping, religious training, and eventual rise to the papacy. There is an interesting emphasis in this version on noble ancestry. R. Shim’on is described as a descendant of King David, and his wife as a member of “one of the finest families in the land.” When the Pope asks his attendant priests why none of the rulers who seek his advice claim to be related to him, he seems to be asking by what lineage he is entitled to his position. The priests answer truthfully that he is “the son of one of the greatest men among the Jews;” however, they do not really acknowledge the greatness of his Jewish lineage, and, therefore, they feel compelled to add that “it is God who has decreed all this greatness for you.” The legend’s Jewish audience is expected, of course, to infer that the boy’s noble Jewish lineage is actually responsible for his rise to office, an indication of the superiority of Jewish nobility to that of their Christian neighbors.

Upon discovering that he is the son of R. Shim’on, the Pope sends for his father and reveals his identity to him. Confessing his disbelief in Christianity, Elhanan asks his father for a penance by which he may atone for his misdeeds. R. Shim’on responds, “You have profaned the Name of the Holy and Blessed One in public, so now hallow His Name in public” — referring to *Kiddush ha-Shem*, literally “the sanctification of God’s Name,” the classical Hebrew term for martyrdom. Following his father’s advice, the Pope assembles the nobles of the Church at a great public gathering, where he proclaims his Jewish faith and then flings himself from atop the tower on which he is standing. Upon hearing the news, R. Shim’on composes the prayer “*Melekh amon*,” which is still recited in the *Shaharit* (morning) service on the second day of Rosh Ha-Shanah. An acrostic in this poem includes the words “Elhanan my son, may he live et-

6. Ibid.

7. From Cambridge Ms. Add. 858, pp. 46a-47a. Published by S.Z.H. Halberstamm, “*Ma’aseh shel Rabbi Shim’on ha-Gadol*,” *Ginzei Nistarot* 3 (1872): 1-4; Aharon [Adolf] Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrash* (Berlin, 1853-1877), vol. 6, pp. 137-139; and Micha Joseph Bin-Gorion, *Mimekor Yisrael: Classical Jewish Folktales*, ed. Emanuel Bin-Gorion, trans. I.M. Lask (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976), vol. 1, pp. 414-416.

ernal life [*hayyei olam*]. Amen.”<sup>8</sup> Recalling this acrostic, the legend refers to the boy’s desire to earn a place in the World to Come (*olam ha-ba*).<sup>9</sup>

R. Shim’om’s promise that Elhanan will enter the World to Come echoes two Talmudic stories about non-Jews who earn their share in that World by a single pious action. In both instances, the action is followed by suicide — in one by jumping into a pyre, and in the other by jumping from atop a tall building.<sup>10</sup> In each case, a rabbi had promised the suicidal character that his act of piety (in the latter case, the jump itself, for the death of this Roman leader annulled an anti-Semitic decree) would earn him entrance into the World to Come.

## 2. Short Sephardic Version (SSV)<sup>11</sup>

The short Sephardic version of the legend offers little more detail than the Ashkenazic source. The text begins with a record of the oral transmission of the story. It is explained that “a great Spanish dignitary” liked the Rashba’s son, arranged for his kidnapping, and enrolled him in a seminary. Eventually, the boy arrived in Rome, and “was made a dignitary (*sar*) with great honor;” this may be understood to mean the Pope, although the text is not explicit on this point. The Rashba goes to Rome to discuss community concerns with this dignitary, but nearly faints in his presence. Upon questioning by the dignitary, the Rashba reveals the story of his lost son. The Pope, who has long known himself to be of Jewish birth, is excited, and asks the Rashba whether the boy had any distinguishing marks. His father describes these, and the Pope removes his vestments to reveal identical marks on his own body. In contrast to the Ashkenazic version, no explicit mention is made here of the boy’s regret or penitence. Instead, he is hesitant; he simply asks his father what “remedy” may be found for his “affliction.” The Rashba answers cryptically that “the remedy for water [baptism] is [death by] fire.” This is reminiscent of the fate under the Inquisition of *conversos* (Spanish, forced converts to Catholicism) who were found to have been insincere in their conversions.

A few days later, the Pope repents, and decides to undergo all four

8. Ernst Daniel Goldschmidt, *Mahzor la-Yamim ha-Nora'im* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981), p. 47; my translation.

9. The text actually seems to understand the first line of one stanza of the poem, which reads “*Elhanan nahalato be-no'am le-hashper*,” as the reference to Elhanan, although the actual acrostic, and not that line, is echoed in the boy’s desire to enter *olam ha-ba* (“*Mah e'eseh ve'eheyeh ben olam ha-ba?*”). This discrepancy may indicate that our text is descended from an earlier version in which the actual acrostic (“*Elhanan b'ni yehi le-hayyei olam. Amen.*”) was quoted and juxtaposed to the boy’s question about entering *olam ha-ba*. The possibility of the existence of an earlier version, which may have originated in another location, is also supported by the mention in our text of “a certain city called Mayence,” as if the reader is not expected to be familiar with the place.

10. *Avodah Zarah* 18a; *Ta'anit* 29a.

11. From Moscow Ms. Ginzburg Collection 652, pp. 108b-109a. Published by Avraham David, “*Beirurim*,” p. 23.

capital punishments of the rabbinical court. This detail, not found in the Ashkenazic versions, is reminiscent of the attempt to re-establish a properly ordained rabbinical court in the sixteenth century in order to assign penance to returning *conversos*.<sup>12</sup> The Pope assembles the people at a public sermon and begins to speak, but suddenly places a noose around his neck and flings himself onto an upturned sword in the midst of a bonfire. The Pope's startled followers preserve his ashes in a bronze urn, calling them the "Ashes of the Heretic." The author of this version, R. Gedalya ibn Yahya, adds that he has personally seen this urn in Rome, echoing Talmudic statements about vessels of the Temple.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. *Long Sephardic Version (LSV)*<sup>14</sup>

In the expanded Sephardic version of the story, each detail is elaborated upon. The son of the Rashba, the text explains, passes by a certain church every day on his way to the house of study. The local priest, watching him, takes a liking to the boy and kidnaps him, enrolling him in *beit midresheiheem*, "their seminary." There, the boy distinguishes himself, and is eventually elected Pope. Curious as to his origin, he makes inquiries, and is told that his family was killed in a feud, but this explanation does not satisfy him.

Sometime later, the Jewish community of Barcelona must send envoys to the Pope to plead for mercy. Divine intervention causes the Rashba, the Pope's father, to be chosen by lot. When the Rashba appears before the Pope, the latter's appearance reminds the rabbi of his kid-

12. Through the Talmudic period (until c. 500 CE), *semikhah*, or ordination of rabbis, was thought to maintain an unbroken chain from God's ordination of Moses on Mount Sinai. Sometime after the redaction of the Talmud, the chain of Divine *semikhah* was broken, and replaced by human ordination. One opinion indicated, however, that a rabbi who obtained the approval of all of the sages of Palestine must be considered to have recovered the lost Divine approbation once transmitted through *semikhah* (Moses Maimonides, *Yad ha-Hazakah*, *Sanhedrin* 4:11). In 1538, an attempt was made to put this ruling into practice. One motivation for this move was the desire to establish a rabbinical court of ordained judges. Such a court would be empowered to impose flagellation or other penance on Jews who were compelled to convert to Christianity during persecutions in Spain but later wished to return to Judaism. The court might subsequently grant absolution to these penitents. See Isaac Levitats and Aaron Rothkopf, "Semikhah," *Encyclopedia Judaica* [1971], vol. 14, cols. 1140-1447. See also, Jacob Katz, "The Dispute between Jacob Berab and Levi ben Habib over Renewing Ordination," *BINAH*, Vol. I, *Studies in Jewish History*, Joseph Dan, ed. (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp.1.7.1-1.7.23. Among the audience of the Jewish Pope legend were Jews who were likely to be quite familiar with the circumstances surrounding forced conversion; at least in the case of the Sephardic versions, the audience probably knew of penitent former apostates as well.

13. *Yoma* 57a, *Sukkah* 5a.

14. From Warsaw Ms. 281, pp. 49a-b, and Oxford Ms. Bodleian Opp. Add. 4° 181, pp. 256-7. Published by Moritz Steinschneider, "Zum Judenpapst," *Israelitische Letterbode* 7 (1881-2): 170-74; Menahem Mendl Gerlitz, ed., *Mavo le-Sifrei ha-Rashba* (Jerusalem, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 189-192.

napped son, and he weeps. The Pope demands an explanation, and the Rashba eventually explains the truth. Curious, the Pope asks the Rashba to return later; he summons his *komer omen* (translated by Shefer-Vanson as “personal priest,”<sup>15</sup> but carrying connotations of adoptive parent and teacher) and demands that he finally be told the truth regarding his origin. He is told that he is a Jew, and also learns some details of his ancestry and of the kidnapping which brought him into the church.

When the Rashba returns to the Pope, the Pontiff asks the rabbi some questions in order to confirm his suspicion that he is the Rashba’s son. When his curiosity is satisfied, he informs his father of his identity and then, overcome with emotion, flings himself at his father’s feet. After the shock of recognition has passed, the Pope asks his father whether Judaism or Christianity is the true faith. The father answers that Judaism is true, and offers both scriptural prooftexts and theological arguments which support his contention. The Pope, who “[is] wise and underst[ands] all forms of wisdom . . . immediately realize[s] the truth.”

The Pope asks his father what penance he may perform in order to save his soul. The father responds, “My son, . . . until now you have fulfilled and exalted their faith publicly; henceforth you will have to do the opposite. . . .” After the Rashba has returned home, the Pope calls a public assembly at which he delivers a sermon against the faith. He concludes: “[B]ecause I strengthened your religion in the past, I condemn myself to death by burning,” and flings himself into the bonfire prepared nearby. Thinking him insane, the Christians call him the “Heretic Pope,” a name retained “even today.”

#### 4. Long Ashkenazic Version (LAV)<sup>16</sup>

The long Ashkenazic version differs in several ways from the others. One Sabbath, a Gentile woman, who lights the fire in the rabbi’s home each week, kidnaps Elhanan while his parents are away at prayers, and baptizes the boy. A Jewish maidservant witnesses the kidnapping, but thinks that the woman is only taking the child out to play. When she realizes her error, she flees in shame, but later returns to tell the rabbi and his wife what has happened. R. Shim’on’s usual clairvoyance fails him; he fasts and prays that they boy’s location be revealed to him, but his prayers are not answered. (R. Shim’on the Great is earlier described as having in his home three mirrors in which he can see the past and the future, but these are not mentioned again in connection with his inability to locate

15. Avraham David, “Notes on the Legend of the Jewish Pope,” trans. Dorothea Shefer-Vanson, *Immanuel* 15 (Winter 1982-3): 96.

16. Originally Yiddish, from *Mayse-bukh* (cf. Enelow, and Jellinek, vol 5, pp. xxxviii, 207). Translated from Yiddish to English by Moses Gaster, in *Ma’aseh Book* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1934, reissued 1981); Hebrew translation published by Jellinek, vol. 5, pp. 148-152.

Elhanan; the reference to the mirrors may be a vestige of an earlier version in which R. Shim'on explicitly consults them in his search.)

Like his father, the boy is a great scholar, rising from one seminary to another until he arrives in Rome and is named a cardinal. Upon the death of the incumbent Pope, Elhanan is chosen as his successor. The new Pope remembers his identity, and resolves to return to his original faith. He strongly desires to see his father again, and decides to lure him to Rome through a ruse. Issuing a decree against the Jews of Mayence, he expects his father to be chosen as the Jewish emissary to plead before the Pope on their behalf.

R. Shim'on and two other delegates are, indeed, chosen to journey to Rome on behalf of their brethren. The Roman Jews, who are surprised to learn of the papal decree, help the delegates arrange an audience with the Pope, who orders that the leader of the delegation alone come before him. He listens to R. Shim'on's plea, but maintains that he has heard many evil things about the Jews of Mayence. The Pope then engages his father in disputation, astonishing the rabbi with his brilliance and vast knowledge. The audience of the legend understood, of course, that the Pontiff's intelligence came from his Jewish ancestry. The Pope, who has very much enjoyed the discussion, assures R. Shim'on that the Jews did well to place their hopes in him.

Then the Pope invites R. Shim'on to play chess with him. Although the rabbi is a master chess player, the Pope defeats him. The two men engage in further disputation, in which R. Shim'on learns great insights from the Pope. Finally, R. Shim'on tearfully repeats his plea on behalf of the Jews of Mayence. The Pope sends away all his attendants, and reveals that he is the rabbi's son. He confesses his ruse and, expressing his desire to repent, asks his father whether he may still do so. R. Shim'on assures him that all sincere penitents are accepted. This tolerance on the part of R. Shim'on reflects a conscious rejection by the LAV author of the harsh demand of personal self-sacrifice present in the earlier versions of the legend. The Pope tells his father to return to Mayence, adding that he will follow after leaving a legacy that will benefit the Jews.

R. Shim'on return to Mayence with a papal document revoking the anti-Semitic decree. In Rome, the Pope composes a book of heresy against the faith, and leaves instructions that all successive Popes must read it. Then he flees in secret, and returns to Mayence and to Judaism. In commemoration of Elhanan's joyous return, R. Shim'on composes a prayer for the second day of Rosh Ha-Shanah in which he alludes to Elhanan's name. In anticipation of skepticism and disbelief, the author of the LAV points to this poem as proof of his story.

The text of this version also includes an alternative recognition scene in which R. Shim'on recognizes his son by the chess moves which he had taught him when Elhanan was still a boy. Like Elhanan's rise to power,



this is another expression of the medieval Jews' belief in Jewish intellectual superiority.

### *Evolution of the Legend*

These four versions of the legend appear to have evolved in the order in which they are described above. The simplicity and concise presentation of the story in the short Ashkenazic and short Sephardic versions suggest some relationship between these two texts and, also, their earlier origin. Avraham David has written that the SAV predates both surviving Sephardic versions,<sup>17</sup> in part because of the mention of R. Shim'on, who preceded the Rashba by three centuries. The LAV is distinguished by the introduction of completely new elements, as well as by its Yiddish-language primary source.

## II

An examination of the legend of the Jewish Pope, according to the structuralist theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss, reveals some interesting insights into its inherent meaning. Lévi-Strauss's interpretation of folk literature, as tales of mediation between binary oppositions, reveals their deep structure. Most interesting in such an analysis of our legend, however, is the story's failure to conform exactly to the form described by Lévi-Strauss.

Lévi-Strauss sees in human thinking an attempt to reconcile the paradoxes, or binary oppositions, inherent in life. These include the oppositions between nature and culture, between good and evil, between life and death, and between the predicted and the observed.<sup>18</sup> In his view, any mythic narrative is structured around one main binary opposition, which may be presented through metaphor: for example, the opposition of nature and culture, which may seem irreconcilable. The same dyad, however, will be further represented in transformations — such as the opposition of raw to cooked foods, or sweet to sour tastes — and these oppositions may then be successfully mediated by a character or an event in the narrative.<sup>19</sup> Although Lévi-Strauss focuses his attention on the application of this theory to myth, it may be used in connection with other forms of narrative as well; Lévi-Strauss himself applies his methodology to the Tsimshian folktale of Asdiwal.<sup>20</sup>

The main binary opposition in the legend of the Jewish Pope is that between Judaism and Christianity. The figure of the young Pope might

17. David, "Beirurim," p. 23.

18. Edmund Leach, *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (New York: Viking, 1970), pp. 15-32.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-73.

20. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Story of Asdiwal," in *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Monique Layton (New York: Basic, 1963), vol. 2, pp. 146-197; rpt. in *Sacred Narrative*, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1984), pp. 295-314.

seem to imply an attempt at mediation, within one individual, of these two opposing faiths, yet the legend actually denies the possibility of any mediation between these opposed systems. The boy and his father, in fact, embody the main opposition, the boy as leader of the Church and his father as a spokesman for Judaism. The legend here expresses the impossibility of compromise in matters of faith; in Lévi-Straussian terms, no possibility exists for mediation of the main binary opposition.

Ultimately, the Pope must confront the opposition between life and death. Here, too, there seems to be no mediation possible. This opposition is actually a transformation (restatement) of the first, for medieval European Jews were often required to choose between conversion to Christianity, rewarded with life in this world, or martyrdom as Jews, followed, they believed, by eternal life in the World to Come. A Hebrew chronicle of the first Crusade in 1096 demonstrates clearly the opposition which medieval Jews saw between this world and the World to Come. The text describes the victims of the Crusade as happy to sanctify God's Name through martyrdom, and thus to enter the World to Come, exchanging "a world of darkness . . . for a world of light, a world of sorrow for one of joy, a transitory world for an eternal world."<sup>21</sup>

The various texts that we have examined above restate the opposition of Judaism and Christianity in several ways. In the SAV, R. Shim'on's advice to his son is expressed as "You have profaned the Name of the Holy and Blessed One in public, so now hallow His Name in public,"<sup>22</sup> setting up an opposition between *hillul ha-Shem*, "desecration of the Name" and *kiddush ha-Shem*, "sanctification of the Name" (i.e., martyrdom). In the SSV, the Rashba tells his son that "[t]he remedy for water is fire,"<sup>23</sup> expressing the religious conflict through yet another transformation.

The SSV further hints at an opposition between the rabbi — the boy's natural father — and the "great Spanish Dignitary," or priest, who loves the kidnapped boy, and enrolls him in "their seminary," treating the boy like a son. This opposition is more elaborately expressed in the LSV, in which the boy is raised and educated by his *komer omen*. When finally confronted by the Pope, his *komer omen* reveals the young man's Jewish origin, and is promptly jailed or killed by the Pope. This purely pragmatic action ends the psychologically awkward situation in which the Pope has both a "good father" — the Rashba — and a "bad father" — his *komer omen*. The elimination of this transformed opposition is not a true resolution; however, even the tragic death of the Pope does not actually resolve the conflict between the faiths.

The LAV also employs contrasting pairs in its expression of the opposition inherent in the Judeo-Christian conflict. Interestingly, there is

21. Shlomo Eidelberg, trans. and ed., *The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of The First and Second Crusades* (Madison, WI: U. of Wisconsin Press, 1977), p. 31.

22. Bin-Gorion, vol. 1, p. 415.

23. David, "Notes," p. 96.

no mention of an adopting priest, or of any individual priest at all. In this version, the Christian woman who kidnaps the child and offers him to the Church is contrasted with the Jewish maidservant employed by the rabbi and his wife, who witnesses the crime and reports it to the boy's parents.

Also in the LAV, the chess game seems to mediate between the faiths, as the Pope tells R. Shim'on that he plays chess with Jews daily, and invites his father to join him in a game. In an impartial game, it must have been hoped, Christian and Jew might perhaps compete against one another as equals. Yet, to the medieval Jewish audience, which knew his true identity, the Pope's victory over his father — like the amazing intellect demonstrated by the Pope in his discussions with the rabbi — merely reinforced a message of Jewish superiority.

It is apparent, then, that our legend is based on the fundamental binary opposition between Judaism and Christianity, which was central to the world view of medieval Jews. An examination of the historical context of the legend, and of the source of several of its motifs, will demonstrate the centrality of this dyad in the lives and thought of medieval European Jewry.

### III

The legend of the Jewish Pope was initially thought to be based on the papal schism of 1130.<sup>24</sup> In that year, Pietro Leonis, a cardinal from the influential Pierleoni family, was elected Pope by a majority of the College of Cardinals and took the name Anacletus II. Pietro's great-grandfather, Benedictus Christianus, was born a Jew, Barukh, and had served as financier in several papal courts even before his conversion to Catholicism. A minority of the cardinals, objecting to Anacletus's Jewish ancestry, denounced him as "antipope" and elected another cardinal in his stead. The schism was resolved in 1138 when Anacletus's successor, appointed by Anacletus's supporters after his death (and similarly labeled an "antipope" by his opponents), abdicated his office.<sup>25</sup>

Others have speculated that the story, at least in its apparently earlier Ashkenazic version, is based on actual events in the life of R. Shim'on the Great of Mayence. Citing the existence of several independent traditions regarding the conversion of R. Shim'on's son, Elhanan, Avraham Grossman suggests that the boy may have been forcibly converted during the persecutions of 1008-1012.<sup>26</sup> The son of Rabbenu Gershom, a distinguished con-

24. See Zinberg, vol. 1, p. 193; Enelow 1: 580; Hermann Vogelstein and Paul Rieger, *History of the Jews in Rome* [1895-1986], trans. and ed. Moses Hadas (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1940), pp. 145-147; and Hymie Klugman, "Elchanan, the Jewish Pope," *Midstream* 34 (1988): 26-27.

25. M. Hirsh Goldberg, *The Jewish Connection* [1976] (New York: Bantam, 1977), pp. 116-18. Also see Joachim Prinz, *Popes From the Ghetto: A View of Medieval Christendom* (New York: Horizon, 1966).

26. Avraham Grossman, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981), pp. 89-90.

temporary of R. Shim'on, is known to have been converted at this time.<sup>27</sup> R. Gershom is mentioned briefly in the SAV as R. Shim'on's colleague, perhaps to imply a connection between the fates of the rabbis' sons. R. Shim'on is also known to have interceded with the Christian authorities on behalf of his fellow Jews. Avraham David implies that the Ashkenazic version of the legend was attached to R. Shim'on for these reasons.<sup>28</sup>

Below we shall examine some motifs which appear in the legend, and the historical realities on which these motifs are based. The frequent forced conversions, martyrdom, and interreligious disputations, as well as the distinctive Jewish dress of the period, contributed to a polarization of the contemporary Jewish world view into an opposition between Christianity and Judaism. The Jewish insistence on the impossibility of compromise intensified in the face of the Christian belief that one might, indeed, change one's religious affiliation. Jewish authorities saw no possibility of mediation between the faiths, nor did they recognize the conversions of Jews to Christianity. This categorical dichotomy is reflected in both the legal and the literary texts of the time.

All three surviving manuscript versions of the legend — the SAV, SSV and LSV — indicate that the Pope's father recognized his son by his distinguishing birthmarks. It is interesting to consider this device in light of the frequent demarcation of medieval European Jews from Gentiles in their mode of dress. Jews were first distinguished from the non-Jewish world with respect to their clothing by Biblical precepts and rabbinic guidelines. In medieval Europe, "[t]hese communal directives were reinforced by numerous Dress Regulations issued by the Church or by the civil authorities . . ."<sup>29</sup> Native European Jewish costumes included the Persian caftan and girdle, as well as a characteristic Jewish hat (*Judenhut*), also said to be of Persian origin.<sup>30</sup> Distinctive medieval European Jewish dress, as prescribed by law, variously included caps, gowns, red or yellow badges, and cowls.<sup>31</sup> These ubiquitous external signs of Jewish exclusion from Gentile society are reflected in the legend by the physical signs or birthmarks on the Jewish Pope himself.

The kidnapping and conversion of the boy constitute the premise for the legend of the Jewish Pope. The Pope's suicide (the conclusion of the earlier versions) is described as *Kiddush ha-Shem*, a concept all too familiar to medieval Jews. The Jewish Pope legend, as we have said, thus reflects the historical realities of Jewish life in medieval Europe. The kidnapping and forced conversion of Jews, especially children, was not uncommon.<sup>32</sup>

27. A. M. Habermann, *Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Zorfat* (Jerusalem: Tarshish, 1945), p. 16.

28. David, "Beirurim," p. 22.

29. Alfred Rubens, *A History of Jewish Costume* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1967), p. 94.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

32. A dramatic episode in the nineteenth century demonstrated that Jews were still subject

Many former Jews did become priests or even higher dignitaries of the Church, and often participated in attacks on those faithful Jews remaining under their jurisdiction.<sup>33</sup> Expulsion and massacres occurred frequently; martyrdom, *Kiddush ha-Shem*, was preferred by Jews over submission to the enemy and conversion to Christianity.

Jacob Katz discusses at length the phenomena of apostasy and martyrdom in his examination of Jewish-Christian relations during medieval times,<sup>34</sup> and emphasizes the extent to which the legal implications of apostasy are discussed in medieval rabbinic literature. By elucidation of the Talmudic principle that "a Jew, even if he sins, remains a Jew," the rabbis ascribed to Jewish apostates to Christianity continuing membership in the Jewish nation,<sup>35</sup> and hoped for the eventual return of such individuals. The legend thus supported the belief that such a return was, indeed, possible.<sup>36</sup>

Although martyrdom was known in earlier Jewish communities as well, Katz observes that "the Ashkenazic Middle Ages outshine all other periods of Jewish history as an epoch of heroic steadfastness."<sup>37</sup> Through their deaths, the martyrs expressed both their repudiation of Christianity and their affirmation of Judaism as the true faith.<sup>38</sup> The Jews hoped that their oppressors would

comprehend, understand, and take to heart, that in folly have they cast our bodies to the ground, and for falsehood have they slain our saints, . . . and

---

to the whim of the Church. In June of 1858, seven-year-old Edgardo Mortara was removed from his parents' home in Bologna, Italy, and taken to Rome. The Church later explained that the Mortaras' Christian maid had secretly baptized the boy when he was ill several years earlier; a baptism performed on a child thought to be suffering from a fatal illness, even if performed without the parents' permission, was considered valid by the Church, so young Edgardo, now healthy again, had to be raised as a Christian (Korn, pp. 3-6). Despite worldwide protests, Church officials, including Pope Pius IX, refused the demands of the Mortara parents that their son be returned. Upon the introduction of secular law to Rome in 1870, Edgardo's parents attempted to bring their son home, but Edgardo, by then called Pius Mary Mortara, and studying for the priesthood, refused to join them (Ibid., p. 159). It is interesting that legends of Edgardo's continuing faithfulness to some Jewish traditions developed even within his own lifetime, though he denied them (Ibid., p. 160). The Mortara episode, far from unique in European Jewish history, graphically demonstrates the continuing discrimination because of which the Jewish Pope legend remained relevant to European Jewry for centuries.

33. H[ayyim] H[illel] Ben-Sasson, "Disputations and Polemics," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971), vol. 6, cols. 79-103.

34. Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1961), pp. 67-92.

35. Ibid.; cf. *Teshuvot Rashi*, 173 and 175.

36. Not only was the fate of Jewish converts to Christianity debated by the rabbis, but the requirements for the acceptance of converts to Judaism were defined as well. In Katz's view, the Jewish "hope to win converts from other faiths" — and occasional actions designed to encourage this — are the best "proof for the fact that medieval Jewry was convinced of Judaism's truth, its superiority, and its religious mission" (Katz, p. 81).

37. Katz, p. 85.

38. Ibid., p. 91.

that they do not know their Creator, nor walk on a virtuous path or an upright way,

according to the Hebrew chronicle of the first Crusade quoted above.<sup>39</sup>

Another fixture of medieval Jewish-Christian relations was the disputation, a debate between representatives of the two faiths, each attempting to prove the superiority of his religion.<sup>40</sup> These debates were sometimes conducted in public, at the insistence of the Christian authorities; in the event of a Christian victory (sometimes predetermined), physical attacks on the Jews often followed. Considerable polemical literature appeared on both sides to prepare potential disputants for the challenges that they were likely to receive.<sup>41</sup>

The discussion between the Pope and his father regarding religious matters, as described in some detail in the longer versions of the legend, is only partially reminiscent of the disputations held in the Middle Ages. The second discussion between R. Shim'on and the Pope in the LAV is an intellectually exciting exchange in which each party learns from the other and enjoys the experience; additionally, neither party to this discussion presents any hostile arguments in support of his own faith. The account seems to be an idealized creation of this version's later author. In fact, as Katz observes, disputations were largely hostile, and called for Jewish apologists to explain away Talmudic quotations which were disparaging to Gentiles.<sup>42</sup> In this respect, the first disputation in the LAV is more realistic. Yet, this discussion, too, is presented by the author as a conversation rather than a dispute. The Pope, who had already resolved to return to Judaism before summoning his father to Rome, shares insights with the latter, although he has not yet revealed his identity to him. In no version of the legend does the Pope offer arguments in support of the Catholic position, even when his father does argue for Judaism, as in the LSV. Thus, the legend preserves the form of a disputation, but neither the content nor the hostility which marked true confrontations between representatives of the faiths.

The frequent disputations between representatives of Judaism and Catholicism in the Middle Ages spurred the imagination of some Jews. The idea that the Pope himself might be convinced, through disputation, to convert to Judaism had several adherents among the Jewish messianists of the time, who hoped that the "return" of the Pope to his faith's mother religion would prompt all Catholics to follow suit and lead, eventually, to divine redemption.

The thirteenth-century Jewish mystic, Avraham Abulafia, an adher-

39. Eidelberg, p. 48.

40. See Katz, pp. 106-113; David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), pp. 3-37; Ben-Sasson, vol. 6, cols. 87-94.

41. Ben-Sasson, vol. 6, col. 89.

42. Katz, p. 109.



ent of this position, attempted to meet with Pope Nicholas III in 1280. By examination of Abulafia's speeches and writings of just before this time, Moshe Idel has shown that Abulafia believed himself to be the Messiah.<sup>43</sup> Idel writes that Abulafia believed himself obligated to confront the Pope in Rome on the eve of Rosh-Ha-Shanah of that year, a year in which both Jews and Christians anticipated some messianic event of great significance. Abulafia felt such pressure to achieve the meeting on time that he was willing to abandon Rome for the Pope's castle in Soriano, in violation both of his prophecy and of the Pope's declaration that any attempt by Abulafia to gain an audience with him would result in the Jew's execution. Abulafia arrived in Soriano the day after the Pontiff's sudden death on 22 August 1280; he was thus forced to abandon his attempt to convert the Catholic leader to Judaism, which Idel shows to have been Abulafia's intention.<sup>44</sup>

In the LSV, the Pope's father presents arguments to his son in support of the validity of Judaism. In light of the contemporary idea that even the Pope might be converted if an appropriate presentation of Judaism were made to him, the legend may be interpreted as a reassurance that the logic of Judaism would convince the fair and impartial listener.

Thus, the medieval Jewish world view reflected the polarization of European society into Jews and Gentiles, with no possibility of mediation or compromise between the two groups. The motif of the conversion of the Pope demonstrates dramatically the emphatic nature of Jewish faith in the ultimate truth of Judaism. The Judeo-Christian opposition, reinforced by repeated incidents of forced conversion, disputation, and instances of martyrdom, had considerable influence on the evolution of the Jewish Pope legend.

#### IV

Motifs appearing in the legend are borrowed from many sources. Biblical motifs are especially relevant to the story of the innocent, kidnapped child, and earlier Jewish stories about the Church are also employed. In addition, the legend shares some motifs with a Christian legend of a woman Pope.

#### *Biblical Motifs*

The Jews naturally couched the Jewish Pope legend in familiar Biblical motifs, some of them drawn from stories which closely parallel the Jewish Pope legend. The narrative of Joseph's rise to power as Vizier of Egypt is one such example. While still a young man, Joseph is taken from the land of the Hebrews against his will. His rise to power brings him a

43. Moshe Idel, "Avraham Abulafia ve'ha-Afifyor: Mashma'uto ve-Gilgulav shel Nisayon she-Nikhshal," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 7-8 (1982-83), (Heb. sect.): 5-6.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

new identity, so that when his brothers come before him to beg for food, they believe they are bowing to an Egyptian prince rather than to their own sibling. Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers, saving his family from death by starvation.

Words borrowed from the Joseph narrative are used in three versions of the Jewish Pope legend, suggesting a connection among the stories. The boy in the story is kidnapped — *nignav* (SAV), or *u-genavo* “and he kidnapped him” (LSV); Joseph tells the Egyptians that “in truth, I was kidnapped [sic]” *gunov gunavti* (Gen. 40: 15).<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the Biblical word for Joseph’s striped coat, *kutonet*, is used in the SSV to describe the Pope’s vestments. Y.Y. Trunks’s Yiddish-language retelling of the later Ashkenazic version of the legend (see V below) even calls R. Shim’on’s son Joseph; the author of this account has the distraught rabbi quote Biblical verses about the disappearance of Joseph when he was taken to Egypt.<sup>46</sup>

Similar motifs appear in other Biblical stories. Moses is brought to the Egyptian Pharaoh’s court while still an infant; he, too, rises to power as a prince, but, in order to help his brethren, he abandons his noble position and joins his people in their suffering (Exodus 2 ff.). Daniel, one of the Jewish children captured by order of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia, eventually becomes the chief adviser to the king. Esther becomes Queen of Persia as a young woman; as the favorite of King Ahasuerus, she is able to avert Haman’s evil decree against the Jews.

Common to these stories is the child taken against his (or her) will and forced to join the enemy leadership, wherein (s)he rises to prominence and is able to help his (or her) brethren. The kidnapped or coerced child is a motif which appears several times in the Hebrew Bible; the expression, *tinok shenishbah*, “captured child,” has become the term in rabbinic texts for the category of individuals who were raised among their captors, in ignorance of Jewish law, and who are, therefore, not punished for its infringement.<sup>47</sup>

The traditional Jewish interpretation of these stories of kidnapped children, expressed in the Bible itself, attributes their captivity to Divine Providence, which has ensured that they will later be in a position to help their brethren. Joseph tells his brothers,

Now, do not be depressed or reproach yourselves that you sold me hither; it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. . . . God has sent me ahead of you to insure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. So, it was not you who sent me here, but God (Gen. 45: 5-8).

45. After *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985). All subsequent Biblical quotations follow this translation.

46. Y[ehiel] Y[ish'ayah] Trunk, “Der Yiddisher Poypst,” in *Kval un Beymer: Historishe Noveln un Esey* (New York: Farlag Unzer Tsayt, 1958), p. 135.

47. See, e.g., Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 68b.

In the book of Esther, Mordecai alludes to this understanding of God's immanence in history, as he admonishes Esther for her initial reluctance to ask the king to show mercy to her Jewish brethren:

Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace. On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis (4: 13-14).

Although this motif is not adopted in its entirety by the legend, the rise of the kidnapped boy to the highest office in his captors' hierarchy of power is reminiscent of these Biblical stories. The legend differs, though, in the conspicuous absence of any significant assistance which the Pope, by virtue of his position, can offer the Jews. Instead, the son-Pope is called upon to sacrifice his life, giving up the power of his office. Only in LAV, with its radically different conclusion, does the Pope aid the Jewish community.

### *St. Peter Legend*

An earlier Jewish legend about St. Peter, an interesting antecedent to the legend of the Jewish Pope, hints at the long history of Jewish suffering at the hands of the Church. The story is preserved in *Sefer Toldot Yeshu*, also called *Tam umu'ad*, a collection of Jewish tales about Jesus and the Apostles.<sup>48</sup> According to this account, a rabbi named Shim'on is confronted by the early Christians and asked to assume the leadership of the fledgling Church. Although initially unwilling, he is persuaded by his fellow Jews to accept the demand, for the Christians have promised not to harm the Jews if they can convince R. Shim'on to join the Church.

R. Shim'on becomes Pope, and orders the Christians to build a tower in which he might commune with Jesus. Thus isolated from the people, the rabbi secretly continues to observe the precepts of Judaism, while periodically instructing the Christians not to harm the Jews. To pass the time, he composes liturgical poems and surreptitiously dispatches them to the Jewish community. The legend ascribes to R. Shim'on the authorship of "*Nishmat kol hai*," a poem of praise still recited every Sabbath morning. The legend also recounts Jesus's renaming of Shim'on as *Kefa*, or *Cephas* in Greek, meaning "rock;" the name assumed the Latin form *Petrus*, from which Shim'on became known as Peter.

This tale, in which a rabbi is forced to become the first Pope, is a predecessor to the later Jewish Pope legend. It is interesting to note that the name Shim'on is also associated with the Ashkenazic versions of the later Pope legend, in which the kidnapped child's father is identified with R. Shim'on the Great.

Samuel Krauss, an authority on *Toldot Yeshu*, supports the opinion of

48. Published in Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* [1902] (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1977).

D. Oppenheimer that the Peter legend was composed in the sixth or seventh century.<sup>49</sup> Although later versions of this legend attribute to Peter the composition of many *piyyutim* (liturgical poems), Krauss concludes that the original legend must have mentioned only “*Nishmat*,” as the other poems attributed to Peter were written later than the origin of the legend.<sup>50</sup> Krauss also cites an interesting parallel legend, preserved in manuscript and published by Oppenheimer, about an apostate Jew who becomes a certain Bishop Andreas. During a time of Christian hatred toward the Jews, this bishop delivers a sermon which placates the Christians and saves his brethren. When the Jews attempt to thank him for his intercession, Andreas asks his brethren to incorporate into their liturgy the prayers which he has composed.<sup>51</sup> This legend may be the basis for Enelow’s ascription of the name Andreas to the Jewish Pope in his discussion of the Pope legend (n. 3 above).

We have said that the legend of the Jewish Pope is an expression of Jewish defiance in the face of political subordination to the Church in the Middle Ages. The Jewish reaction to this opposition between religions, as expressed in the legend, was one of complete confidence in the ultimate truth of their faith and in the eventual reward that they could expect for their loyalty. The existence of an earlier legend about Peter, then, demonstrates that this political and physical oppression began quite early in Jewish history and persisted for over a millennium, producing the defiant reactions of pride in Jewish intellectual capacities and steadfastness in faith. The Jews’ continued subjugation contributed to the persistence of the legend — both in its original form (concerning Peter) and in a later, modified form — as a response to the continuing need for the reassurances that the story offered its audience.

### *Pope Joan Legend*

Contemporary with the Jewish legend of a Jewish Pope, there was one of Christian origin concerning a woman Pope. It shares with the Jewish story a central character who attains the papacy although belonging to a group not normally eligible for that office. The legend describes a woman, originally either from England or from Mayence, who studies in Athens for a time. In the ninth century she goes to Rome disguised as a man; she gives well-received lectures and soon rises to ecclesiastical office. Eventually, she becomes the Pope, taking (according to some versions) the name John Anglicus.<sup>52</sup>

The Papess (or Popess, as she is called in later sources), is said to have

49. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 227-28.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

52. J.J.I. von Döllinger, *Fables Respecting the Popes of the Middle Ages*, trans. Alfred Plummer (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1872), pp. 15-16; C.M. Aherne, “Joan, Popess, Fable of,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967), vol. 7, pp. 991-92.

held office for over two years. Her sex is finally discovered when she gives birth to a child on a side street in Rome during an official procession; she either dies in childbirth and is buried there, or is immediately removed from office. According to the legend, Pope Joan is commemorated by a statue and an inscription on the small street where she gave birth. In addition, subsequent papal processions refrained from taking that street, although it was more direct than alternate routes.<sup>53</sup>

This story was written about 1250, and repeated and believed from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries.<sup>54</sup> A statue of Joan was even included among those of the Popes in the cathedral of Siena around 1400.<sup>55</sup> She was usually said to have succeeded Leo IV (d. 855), who, Döllinger notes, was the only Pope in several centuries to have been elected by virtue of intellectual distinction.<sup>56</sup>

As in the case of the Jewish Pope legend, the story of a woman Pope attached itself to — or, perhaps, was inspired by — several familiar objects. A statue of an adult in flowing robes, accompanied by a child, once stood on a small street in Rome, near what could have been a tombstone. That same street, probably because of its narrow width, was avoided by official processions (and later demolished). In addition, newly-elected Popes sat at their initiations on a pierced, hollow stone chair. The legend explains that this enabled Church officials to verify the sex of the new Pontiff. The missal was said to have been shortened considerably by the removal of the hymns composed by Joan after her identity was discovered.<sup>57</sup> This reference to liturgical composition is intriguingly reminiscent of the Jewish Pope legend; of course, unlike the Christians, the Jews were proud to retain prayers composed by a Pope who was secretly faithful to his Jewish origins.

In another interesting parallel to the Jewish Pope legend, Joan was often said to have come from Mayence, the home of R. Shim'on the Great. Döllinger explains that "[t]he rise of the myth falls into the period of the great contest between the papacy and the empire... [T]he men of Mayence represent the usurpation of the empire by Germans, in violation of the birthright of Rome."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Joan's studies in Athens, as mentioned in the legend, recall the primacy of Athens as the center of scholarship in the ancient world. Since even a fictional woman Pope, if she would dare to become pregnant while in office, could not have been called pious, the only remaining way for Joan to have "attain[ed] to the highest office in the Church is through eminent scholarship such as that represented by ancient Athens."<sup>59</sup>

53. Döllinger, pp. 15-16.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-54.

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

To this day, the legend of the Jewish Pope has remained popular. The LAV is the version usually retold, and it probably owes its popularity to its publication in the *Mayse-Bukh*, as discussed above. It has been adapted into poetry and drama, and retold in Jewish children's storybooks and magazines.<sup>60</sup>

Use of the LAV, the one version which has a happy ending, in most modern retellings, is typical of the current tendency to "sanitize" published folktales. Robert Darnton discusses the modification of originally violent and gory tales such as "Little Red Riding Hood" in modern editions, in comparison to older versions of the same stories as recorded from eighteenth-century informants.<sup>61</sup> The legend of the Jewish Pope was similarly adapted, initially for a seventeenth-century audience (as in the *Mayse-Bukh*) and later for nineteenth- and twentieth-century readers. The legend retained its popularity, at least through the nineteenth century, as a result of the continuing inter-religious conflict, and later became known as a sort of Jewish fairy tale.

### *Ba'al Shem Tov Story*

One later Jewish use of the Jewish Pope motif is a tale concerning the eighteenth-century ḥasidic leader, R. Israel Ba'al Shem Tov ("Master of the Good Name"). In the story, as retold by both Kotliansky and Buber,<sup>62</sup> a wealthy Jew is delighted to play host to a ḥasid of the late Ba'al Shem Tov. He eagerly asks the ḥasid to relate a story about the master, but the ḥasid, although famous for knowledge of many such stories, cannot remember a single one. After spending the Sabbath with his host, the ḥasid departs, quite embarrassed and dejected. Suddenly he remembers a story, and returns to the home of his host, who listens intently to the account.

The Ba'al Shem Tov (relates the ḥasid) once traveled to a city where the Pope (or a bishop, according to Buber) was delivering a public sermon. The rabbi sent this ḥasid to summon the Pope, who heeded the call and came to the house where the Ba'al Shem Tov was staying. The two

59. Ibid., pp. 72-73.

60. See "Aunt Naomi" [Gertrude Landa], "The Pope's Game of Chess," in *Jewish Fairy Tales and Legends* [1919] (New York: Bloch, 1952), pp. 213-24; Baila Minkoff, "A Legend of Old," *Haderekh* 7, no. 42 (1959): 8-9; and Trunk (see note 46). Also cf. Annette Labovitz, *Secrets of the Past, Bridges to the Future* (Miami: Central Agency for Jewish Education, 1984), pp. 28-32, in which both Elhanan's return home and his (later) martyrdom are incorporated into one version.

61. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* [1984] (New York: Vintage, 1985), pp. 9-15.

62. S[olomon] S[olomonovitch] Kotliansky, "The Salvation of a Soul," in *Feast of Leviathan*, Leo W. Schwartz comp. and ed. (New York: Rinehart, 1956), pp. 343-350; Martin Buber, "The Forgotten Story," in *The Legend of the Baal-Shem*, Maurice Friedman, trans. (New York: Harper, 1955), pp. 107-120.



spent a long time behind the closed door of a room; then both the rabbi and the ḥasid left the town.

The ḥasid adds that he does not know what happened in the room where the Ba'al Shem Tov spoke to the Pope. Incredibly, his wealthy Jewish host volunteers to finish the story. He explains that he was that Pope, a former Jew who had been visited by the rabbi in his dreams and told to return to Judaism. The rabbi's visit came just at the moment when he might have made the wrong decision. The Ba'al Shem Tov had promised, adds the host, that one day he would be told his own story, and that this would signal his true penitence and complete forgiveness. He was, therefore, most anxious to hear a story from this ḥasid, and when none was forthcoming, he took this as a sign that he must intensify his prayer and repentance. When the ḥasid returned and told his story — the host concludes — he knew he had finally been forgiven.

This complex tale-within-a-tale emphasizes the possibility for penitence and return to Judaism at any time, and the hope that all apostates, no matter what their positions, will choose to return. In this respect, it is certainly an heir to the Jewish Pope motif and its meaning. The legend is especially close to the LAV with respect to repentance always being an option, even for the Pope. The tale was collected from the oral tradition by Koteliensky, who recorded it from his mother. It is quite possible, therefore, that it inherited the Jewish Pope motif through oral transmission in eighteenth-or nineteenth-century Eastern Europe, the center of Hasidism.

*"Der Yiddisher Poypst"*

A twentieth-century Yiddish retelling of the story by Y.Y. Trunk (n. 46 above), mentioned above for its use of Biblical quotations, is a beautiful work which adds some European folktale motifs to the original tale. At the beginning of the story, R. Shim'on is childless. He prays for a child, but is disturbed by a dream containing a trebled prophecy of Elhanan's birth, apostasy, and eventual return. Subsequently, Elhanan is born. [Trebled signs of future events, and the miraculous birth of the hero to childless parents, were similarly identified by Vladimir Propp as common motifs in numerous Russian wondertales.<sup>63</sup>]

During R. Shim'on's stay among the Jews of Rome, Trunk has him attend a mandatory Christian sermon to the Jews, symbolizing once again the inter-religious conflict of the period. Yet, Trunk presents a cheerful picture in which R. Shim'on and the Roman Jews stuff their ears with cotton before the sermon, and communicate in sign language. R. Shim'on and the leader of the Roman Jewish community emerge, after the event, deep in conversation over the Jewish laws concerning idolatry.

63. Cf. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, Laurence Scott, trans. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 119-25.

It is interesting to compare the original legend to a story written in the United States in the mid-twentieth century — Isaac Bashevis Singer’s “Zaydlus der Ershter,” or “Zydlus the First.”<sup>64</sup> Singer’s story is an original work, but uses the old motif of the Jewish Pope in an interesting way. In the story, Zaydel Cohen, a brilliant but haughty Jew, is tempted by his evil inclination to convert to Christianity, a religion which will properly honor him for his erudition, possibly even rewarding him with its highest office, the papacy. Zaydel loses his faith and does convert, only to discover that officials of the Church are no more altruistic than were their Jewish counterparts. Now disillusioned with all religion, Zaydel squanders his father’s inheritance and becomes a sick old pauper. As he sits on the church steps begging for alms, he remembers the Torah that he had learned in his youth (*girsu de-yankuso*), while his mastery of Christian theology vanishes. Eventually, he despairs of finding any truth in the world. Ironically, it is his entrance into Hell that finally cheers him, for the existence of evil proves the existence of good.

As Shalom Rosenberg has explained, “[t]he conclusion of the story essentially shows us that there is meaning within evil, within the very depths of evil.”<sup>65</sup> Rather than denying the existence of absolute, objective evil, notes Rosenberg, the author acknowledges this force. Not content to end on such a pessimistic note, however, Singer uses the reality of evil as the basis for a “strange and paradoxical leap” of faith, according to Rosenberg: he employs the Talmudic reasoning of an *a fortiori* argument (*kal va-homer*) to prove that if Satan exists, then God, too, must exist.<sup>66</sup>

The original legend of the Jewish Pope reflected the circumstances of Jewish life in Christian Europe. Singer’s story was published in 1943, amid the Nazi destruction of European Jewry, and his use of the Jewish Pope motif as a means of examining the power of evil is a reflection of the bestial violence inflicted on Europe during the Holocaust. Singer’s story betrays a conviction that, despite the evil that is clearly present in the world, especially that directed against the Jew, there exists an ultimate good.

Another point may also be gleaned from Singer’s story. The author’s imagery is clearly a corruption of the original legend. For example, Zaydel is described as ugly and unpersonable even in his youth, in sharp contrast to the boy in the legend, whose personality and appearance are praised. Most remarkable, in comparison to the legend, is Zaydel’s voluntary decision to convert. This inversion of motifs bespeaks an inversion of meaning for Singer as well. Whereas the medieval legend appealed to

64. In Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Der Sotn in Goray* (New York: F. Matones, 1943), pp. 273-286.

65. Shalom Rosenberg, *Tov va-Ra be-Hagut ha-Yehudit* ([Jerusalem]: Ministry of Defense Publishers, 1985), p. 100; my translation.

66. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101; my translation.

oppressed Jews, Singer's story is directed toward Jews who enjoy at least *de jure* equality with their non-Jewish neighbors. Writing in twentieth-century America, site of perhaps the most comfortable Jewish exile, Singer is acquainted with Jews who desire willingly to assimilate, to leave the fold, a feeling uncommon among medieval Jewry. When Singer has Zaydel forget Christian theology as easily as he learned it, while remembering that which he learned in his youth, he expresses his belief that one cannot successfully abandon one's Jewish heritage even if one wishes to do so. Singer's message is addressed to a community of American Jews, many of whom considered assimilation preferable to faithfulness to their tradition. In these new circumstances, vastly different from those of medieval Jewry, the legend is adapted to convey a new message.

## VI

The legend of the Jewish Pope arose as an expression by medieval Jews of their inwardly defiant reaction to their political status under Christian rule in Europe. Essentially, it updated an earlier Jewish legend about Saint Peter, but, in its new incarnation, the story drew motifs from the Bible as well as from contemporary Jewish messianism. The details of the legend were also made to reflect the realities of contemporary European Jewish life.

The experience of oppression did not start with medieval Jews; on the contrary, there are numerous examples of suffering, and instances of the Jews being treated as outsiders, in both Biblical and post-Biblical Jewish literature. It was natural for the authors of the legend to employ these images in the story of the Jewish Pope, thus linking the medieval Jewish experience to the eternity of Jewish history. The remarkable longevity and persistent popularity of the legend may be explained in a similar fashion: as long as Jews lived under conditions of oppression, especially when in conflict with the Church, the legend reminded them of the long history and steadfast faith of their people. It was, therefore, faithfully preserved and retold.

The legend began as a sketchy outline, but developed into an elaborate story with a form much like that of the European fairy tale. This evolution reflects the influence of other European folklore on the legend, especially during its dissemination via the primarily Yiddish oral tradition. Like many other European folktales, the legend has today become a children's story, and its best-known version — the latest to evolve — features a happy ending.

Lévi-Straussian structural analysis assumes that the human mind conceives of the world in terms of binary oppositions, and methods of mediation between these pairs. The theory further maintains that these oppositions constitute the deep structure of a culture's myths. Through a brief examination of the history of medieval European Jewry, we have at-

tempted to show that the world view of this particular group of people was, indeed, constructed of such oppositions, most notably those between Judaism and Christianity, and between this world and the World to Come, the two dyads upon which the legend of the Jewish Pope is based. The juxtaposition of historical and structural analysis, then, yields, a consistent picture of a society which saw the world in terms of binary oppositions, and of a legend from that society which is structured around two such oppositions. At the same time, it reveals these irreconcilable oppositions as the foundations of the powerful medieval Jewish faith, which strengthened the Jews in their resolve never to succumb to the oppression that they suffered at the hands of the religious majority which surrounded them.

# *Biblical Prophetesses Through Rabbinic Lenses*

LEILA L. BRONNER

THE INCREASING ROLE OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC life has led to a new interest in the place of women in religious traditions. However, Biblical prophetesses have attracted little interest, and insufficient research has been devoted to analyzing their life activities in Bible and Talmud. A new dimension will be added to our image of them by comparing and contrasting the rabbinic Sages' descriptions of these women with the Sages' own concepts of womanhood.

The attitude of the rabbinic teachers toward the Biblical female figures is ambivalent and complex: on the one hand, idealizing and adoring, while, on the other hand, calculating and critical. While the Sages censure the behavior of Biblical men and point out their shortcomings, their darts are sharper and more stereotyped when aimed at the frailties of women. Even those Biblical heroines who, by the time of the Sages, were regarded as the founding mothers of the people of Israel, are subject to the kind of criticism that ascribed weak character traits as germane to the female gender.

Constantly, women appear as a gender, rather than as individuals, in legal talmudic texts. Specific non-Biblical female figures who are mentioned by name in the Talmud are few, and most are wives of leading rabbis. Some of these are Rachel, Yalta, Imma Shalom, and Bruria. R. Yehuda's learned maidservant, though nameless, also features in this literature. Two queens appear in the pages of Talmud, Salome Alexandra and Queen Helena, a convert to Judaism, and they are treated preferentially, in keeping with their status.<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Bruria and the queens, all of these women are private figures, active in the home, with no possibility of breaking into the male framework of learning, which was the key to leadership. Thus, there is little variety in the portraits of women presented in the Talmud.

In a previous paper, "The Changing Face of Women from Bible to Talmud," I show that Biblical women, interestingly, enjoyed a higher political image and leadership role than that experienced by talmudic women.<sup>2</sup> This inquiry aims to introduce a new image of women by

1. T.B. *Nazir* 3:6; 4a; T.B. *Taanit* 2a; T.B. *Berakhot* 48a; *Genesis Rabba*, 91:3.

2. L. Bronner, "The Changing Face of Woman from Bible to Talmud," *Shofar* (Spring, 1988): 34ff.

---

LEILA L. BRONNER is Adjunct Associate Professor of Bible and History, University of Judaism, Los Angeles.

studying them as individuals rather than as members of a gender, as is found in the legalistic portions of the Talmud. We will analyze the lives of seven famous Biblical women according to Talmudic and Midrashic sources and, on the basis of this material, the Talmudic Sages' understanding of, and attitude toward, Biblical prophetesses will be evaluated.

The Talmud is traditionally called an "ocean," which symbolizes its vastness and depth, and a comprehensive study of everything in it is impossible. As the Talmud says: "He who tries to grasp too much grasps nothing at all," so I selected one informative and unique passage in the tractate *Megillah* and will use it as the basis on which to build my structure. The dates of the documents used in this study are difficult to ascertain, but, generally, they range from 300 C.E. onwards. The Mishnah, which is earlier, closed circa 200 C.E., but, because it contains only legal material, it does not feature in my analysis. Although many centuries lie between the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Philo, Josephus, and the rabbinic literature, there is an affinity between these sources and rabbinic literature, as well as with classical literature. Therefore, reference will be made to these sources for purposes of comparison or contrast.

The *Gemarah* in *Megillah* 14b mentions that there were forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses who arose during Israel's history. The female prophetesses are enumerated by name, but, surprisingly, the male prophets' names are not given. The women designated as possessing the prophetic inspiration are Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther. The only other female personalities described as having the prophetic spirit are the matriarchs, of whom only Sarah appears in *Megillah*.<sup>3</sup> The Biblical text ascribes prophetic powers to only three out of the seven appearing in the rabbinical list: Miriam, Deborah and Huldah. The passage illustrates how the Talmudic exegetical methods amplify and refashion Biblical persons, events, and teachings in light of their theological needs.

In the Hebrew Bible, the word *nebiah*, or prophetess, is used to describe five specific women. Three appear in the Sages' list, but No-diah, the false prophetess of Nehemiah's day (Neh. 6:14) and the anonymous prophetess in Is. 8:3 are omitted.

There are a variety of characteristics attributable to prophets. Basically, a prophet is a person who serves as a channel of communication between the human and the Divine worlds. The Hebrew for prophet, *nabi*, by the consensus of scholars, means to call, announce, and, thus, speak the word of God. Does the *nebiah*, the feminine counterpart of the *nabi*, function in the same way, according to the Sages? The subject under study will elucidate this question.

3. *Genesis Rabba*, 67.9; *Midrash Tehillim*, 105.14.



*She Discerns by the Spirit of God*

R. Isaac commences his description of Sarah's prophetic excellence by an exegetical analysis of the word *Yiscah* (Gen. XI:29), explaining that Sarah was called *Yiscah* because she discerned (*sakethah*) by means of the Holy Spirit. Nowhere does Scripture describe Sarah as having the power of prophecy, though Abraham is described as a *nabi* (Gen. 20:7). Some scholars suggest that the book of Isaiah uses the word *nebiah* to describe the prophet's wife, suggesting that he conferred his title upon her (Is. 8:3). This example might have moved R. Isaac to confer the title of prophetess on Sarah, but a survey of Israel's historical sources would indicate that, in general, the wife was not given the feminine title of the husband's profession.<sup>4</sup>

The Sages are eager to see Sarah as a prophetess, and proceeded to prove their point, though without explicit scriptural backing, by claiming that not only was she a prophetess, but that her spirit of prophecy was even greater than Abraham's. Proof is sought in the words of the Lord, who commands Abraham, "In all that Sarah tells thee, hearken to her voice."<sup>5</sup> The Midrash, to further her spiritual uniqueness, claimed that she was the only woman in the Bible with whom God spoke, implying that with the other prophetesses God used an intermediary.<sup>6</sup> Although Philo consistently deprecates women, to Sarah he ascribes great spirituality, and describes her allegorically as of such excellence that she belongs to the male rank of the intellect and not to female sensuality.<sup>7</sup> The Zohar claims that, like the patriarchs and a handful of other greats, she died by the kiss of God.<sup>8</sup> In Talmudic literature the only woman described as dying by the kiss of God is Miriam, and this gave rise to discussions of the propriety of such an image.<sup>9</sup>

The Sages' fascination with the word *Yiscah* continues, and indicates their concern to depict Sarah as both spiritual and beautiful. They derive the name *Yiscah* from a root meaning "to look," and interpret this as meaning that all gazed at her beauty, which she retained throughout her journeys, and even into old age.<sup>10</sup> R. Hisda explained her self-description, "After I have waxed old, I have had youth," to mean that after the flesh was worn and the wrinkles multiplied, Sarah was rejuvenated and returned to her original beauty.<sup>11</sup> In the opinion of the

4. Clarence J. Vos, *Woman in Old Testament Worship* (Delft: Judels & Brinkman, 1968), p. 207.

5. Genesis 21:12; *Exodus Rabba*, 1:1; *Genesis Rabba*, 47:1.

6. *Genesis Rabba*, 20:6; Jerusalem Talmud *Sotah* 8; *Midrash Tehillim*, 9, 86.

7. Philo, *De Abrahamo*, 206 (Loeb Classical Library); idem, *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesin*, 4:15 (Loeb Classical Library); J.R. Wegner, "The Image of Woman in Philo," *SBL Seminar Papers* (Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1982), pp. 551-63.

8. *Zohar*, 125b (Soncino Edition, Vol. 2, 1984).

9. T.B. *Baba Bathra* 17a.

10. *Genesis Rabba*, 40:4; T.B. *Sanhedrin* 69b.

11. T.B. *Baba Mezi'a* 87a.

Sages, the manner in which the Bible phrases the description of the 127 years of her life (Gen. 23:1) once again emphasizes her beauty. The word "year" is inserted after each figure in the number of her age ("one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years") to show that she was as beautiful at one hundred as at the age of twenty. The tradition of Sarah's beauty existed even before the Sages, as is witnessed by the Genesis Apocryphon found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>12</sup>

We have seen that rabbinic literature generally evaluates Sarah in a positive way, and criticism of her behavior pales in comparison with the praise showered upon her. Nevertheless, the Sages make even Sarah, the founding mother, subject to the frailties of the female sex. In a well-known Midrash she is described as eavesdropping.<sup>13</sup> A sage, commenting on Kohelet's verse, "A man in a thousand I found but a woman in a thousand not," gives Abraham and Sarah as the examples.<sup>14</sup> Her most serious sin is that she laughed in disbelief rather than accepting in faith that she would bear a child, to be called Isaac. However, Abraham, likewise, laughed, but he is not rebuked.<sup>15</sup>

The most distressing fact is that, though the Sages ascribe to Sarah higher prophetic powers than to Abraham, this ascription is empty praise without an opportunity for her to influence the world. For example, she is totally ignored in the moment of the great trial, the *Akedah*, the binding of Isaac. Some midrashim ask, "Where was Sarah when Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac?" One midrash relates how the Satan, disguised as an old man, tells her that her son is being taken by his father to be sacrificed, while another midrash relates that he later returns to her and says that Isaac lives. In any case, the shock of the experience causes her instant death. This sequence of events might be intended to illustrate female frailty, in contrast to male stability, which, presumably, can withstand all difficulties.

A more negative midrash concerning the *Akedah* describes Abraham vacillating whether or not to tell Sarah about his intentions to sacrifice their son. Here, the words "women are lightheaded," are placed in Abraham's mouth, implying that his wife would hinder rather than help him in fulfilling God's command. Once again the midrash is saying that women are not responsible, and that even the elite, like Sarah, are inferior to men in tenacity of purpose and piety.<sup>16</sup>

12. J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1* (Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1966), column 20:2ff.

13. *Genesis Rabba*, 18:2, 45:5.

14. *Ecclesiastes Rabba*, 7:49. For more unflattering comments concerning Sarah, see L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, Vol. 5 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), note 142.

15. *Targum Genesis* 17:17; compare *Targum Genesis* 18:12. One should compare the disparity of treatment between Biblical heroes and heroines, such as Aaron and Miriam, Adam and Eve, etc.

16. Chaim N. Bialik, and Y.H. Ravnitzky, *Sefer Ha-aggadah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1955), p.

We noted rabbinic exegesis on the name *Yiscah* to define Sarah's prophetic power and personality. The rabbinic hermeneutical amplification of Biblical sources weaves an elevated image of Sarah: prophetess, the only woman prophetess to speak with God, superior to her husband in prophecy, who died by a kiss of God. Nevertheless, when all is said, the impression remains that her greatest merit is in being Sarah, which literally connotes "to strive," and, by analogy, "princess," striving to fulfill her husband's wishes. Her excellence is in supporting, not leading, an excellent role model for posterity.

*"Sing Unto the Lord"*

Revisiting Miriam's story, in light of Talmudic and Midrashic exegetical elaboration and imagination, we find new dimensions to her Biblical profile. The Talmudic sources, taking the Biblical lead, regarded Miriam as a prophetess and attributed important prophecies to her. In *Midrash Rabbah* and elsewhere she is depicted as engineering the remarriage of her parents and dancing at their wedding. She prophesies the birth of Moses and foretells his brilliant career as redeemer. The meaning of her name, like her brother's, is linked with the Egyptian bondage. A recent study gives a detailed analysis of the name Miriam in light of the latest research.<sup>17</sup> For the purpose of this study, the Midrashic explanation that the name, Miriam, means "bitterness" is relevant, since the rabbis claim that the meaning of her name reflects her deep involvement as leader during the bondage experience.<sup>18</sup>

The Talmudic and Midrashic sources most frequently describe Miriam and her brothers as leaders and redeemers of their people from Egypt. R. Jose the son of R. Judah says: "Three good leaders (*parnassim*) had arisen to Israel, namely, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam; for their sake three good things were conferred upon Israel, namely the well, the pillar of cloud, and the manna."<sup>19</sup> When they died these good things disappeared. Like the patriarchs, the three siblings are described as dying by the kiss of God and their corpses are not exposed to ravage.<sup>20</sup>

The Sages' most serious difficulty with Miriam was her apparent celibate state. The Bible nowhere states or even hints that Miriam was married. Whereas the other Biblical prophetesses are introduced as being the wife of some person, she does not get such an introduction, allowing one to assume that she had no husband. She is simply introduced as the sister of Aaron and Moses.<sup>21</sup> Rabbinic sources describe

30; T.B. *Shabbat* 33a; T.B. *Kiddushin* 80b; cf. Rashi on T.B. *Abodah Zarah* 18b.

17. R.J. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Only Spoken Through Moses*, SBL Dissertation Series 84 (Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1987), pp. 87ff.

18. *Pesikta Rabbati*, Vienna, 1880, 5:50b.

19. T.B. *Ta'anit* 9a.

20. T.B. *Moed Katan* 28a; T.B. *Baba Batra* 17a; *Genesis Rabba*, 11:12.

21. In Exodus 15:21, only Miriam is mentioned; in Numbers 12:1-15 and Micah 6:4,

her as married to Caleb and mother of Hur, and, thus, the ancestor of Bezalel. This is necessary, not only for their image of woman as married, but also shows that she was rewarded for her efforts as a midwife, since God had promised to give to the midwives who disobeyed Pharaoh's orders houses of their own (Ex. 1:21). Rabbinic tradition maintains that these midwives were Yochebed and Miriam, and that they were given the gifts of priesthood and kingship.<sup>22</sup>

As shown in reference to Sarah, rabbinic literature places a high value on physical and spiritual female beauty. It is interesting to note that Scripture never describes Miriam as beautiful, but the Midrash makes up for the scriptural lacuna. After her sin of maligning Moses, she was stricken with leprosy, which was reputed to deform the person, but God healed her so dramatically that she became young again. The Midrash reads:

She (Miriam) contracted a grievous sickness, . . . all thought she would die. But she recovered, and God restored her youth and bestowed unusual beauty upon her so that renewed happiness awaited her husband, who had been deprived of conjugal life during her illness.<sup>23</sup>

As one of the heroines of the nation, Miriam had to be given a pleasing appearance and an acceptable status as wife and mother.

Though the Sages shy away from women leaders, the case of Miriam is exceptional, and her leadership activities are praised rather than criticized. Even Josephus and Philo, who lived before the Talmud, appear to have a tradition of respect for her.<sup>24</sup> The Sages, just like Josephus and Philo, display the influence of the Biblical text. Although they try to weave a picture of her as wife and mother, the image of Miriam that emerges despite their brilliant exegesis is sister of Moses and Aaron, prophetess and leader who spoke with God.

*"Awake, Sing!"*

Two of the most outstanding women leaders mentioned in the Bible are Deborah and Huldah, whose public careers were difficult for the rabbis to accept, since they did not have any established methodological rules with which to communicate about women of this caliber. Two objectives seem to inform their discussions about the personality of Deborah. First, with their imaginative methodology, they try to identify who and what type of person her husband was. More important, they reiterate what they describe as her tendency towards arrogance. The Bible

all of the siblings are mentioned.

22. *Exodus Rabba*, 1:16, 17.

23. T.B. *Sotah* 11b; *Exodus Rabba*, 1:17.

24. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 4, in *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co.), chap. 5, p. 119; Philo, "On the Tilling of the Earth by Noah," in *The Works of Philo Judaeus*, tr. C.D. Yonge (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), p. 394.

introduces Deborah as a prophetess, married to a man named Lapidoth. She is described as judging Israel while sitting under a palm tree, and she organized a defensive war against Israel's enemy by sending for Barak and appointing him to lead the battle (Judg. 4:4).

We turn first to analyze rabbinic attempts to discover what type of person was Deborah's husband. The investigation is more fanciful than factual, and this type of rabbinic search concerning a woman's husband is not found in connection with any other Biblical female figure. The rabbinic mind tends to define women as belonging to men. Neusner goes so far as to state that the subject of women in the Talmud is merely (sic) brought up to describe how a woman is taken from the possession of one man to another.<sup>25</sup> The Midrash discusses what is meant by the words *esheth Lapidoth*, literally, a "woman of flames." Some Sages say that Deborah's husband was an ignorant man, and that he made wicks for the sanctuary so that he might achieve merit and gain a share in the world to come.<sup>26</sup> The later *Yalkut Shimoni*, reflecting earlier Midrashic traditions, gives her husband three different names: Barak, Michael, and Lapidoth.<sup>27</sup> He is called Barak, lightning, because his face exudes flashes of light. He is also called Michael, they explain, as one who humbled himself. Is this a dig at his wife, who, according to the Sages, exhibited the reverse quality? From the discussion of the threefold name of Deborah's husband in the *Yalkut Shimoni*, it is difficult to identify with certainty who exactly he was.<sup>28</sup>

The Sages also discuss whether Barak, the leader of the army, was her husband. If so, why did she have to send for him? Kimchi, a medieval exegete, suggests that, as Moses separated himself from his wife when he became a prophet, so Deborah, when she became a prophetess, separated from her husband.<sup>29</sup> Other Sages attempt to show that Barak and Lapidoth were not identical, because Barak was a learned person, unlike the ignorant Lapidoth.

The connection between Barak and Lapidoth might have emerged from the semantic similarity between the terms, Barak and Lapidoth, which are both associated with fire or light,<sup>30</sup> but no firm connection between the individuals referred to as Lapidoth and Barak can be established, and this correlation must remain, therefore, in the realm of romantic imagination.

To turn now to the more serious matter of the rabbinic tradition

25. J. Neusner, *A History of Mishnaic Law of Women. Part 1: Yebamot* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), pp. ixff.

26. T.B. *Megillah* 14b; compare *Midrash Seder Olam*, chap. 10.

27. *Yalkut Shimoni* Judges 2:7, 42:4; *Seder Olam Rabba*, ch. 19.

28. *Yalkut Shimoni* Judges 2:7, 42:4.

29. D. Kimḥi, *Commentary to Judges*, 4:61.

30. *Tanna Debei Eliahu*, chap. 10, p. 50.

attributing arrogance to Deborah, we find Rabbi Nahman, a 4th century Amora, who said:

Haughtiness does not befit women. There were two haughty women and their names are hateful, one being called a hornet, *ziborata* (Deborah) and the other a weasel, *kurkushta* (Huldah). Of the hornet it is written "And she went and called Barak, instead of going to him." Of the weasel it is written, "Say to the man," instead of "say to the king."

In context, the passage clearly implies that the names (given in *Megillah* 14b in Aramaic) are ugly, and are indicative of the women's personalities. Traditionally, names in the Bible and Talmud are taken very seriously, as they are regarded both as a key to the person named and a guide to his or her personality. Elijah, for instance, is, according to scholars, called by the name "YHWH is God" to demonstrate that every fibre of his being was devoted to worship.<sup>31</sup> While theophoric names are rare for women in Scripture, animal names are given without any suggestion that they are negative.<sup>32</sup> Josephus, interestingly, states that the people sought help from a prophetess whose name was Deborah, which means "a bee" in Hebrew.<sup>33</sup> Though he attributes no sinister connotation to the name, it is significant, in light of the later rabbinic comment, that he mentions it. It is amusing to note that Semonides of Amorgos, who lived in the seventh century B.C.E., in his unflattering description of the creation of woman, enumerates seven animals from which woman was made, and he claims that only the one made of the bee is a good wife. This early tradition had obviously not reached the Sages.<sup>34</sup>

Considering how important names are in tradition as a guide to the person's qualities, R. Nahman's comment must be analyzed with great seriousness. Sarah's name *Yiscah* makes reference to her beauty, and so with Esther and others. To say that a name is ugly denigrates the bearer of it.

Deborah's arrogance is once again discussed in tractate *Pesahim*, where the following information is offered: R. Judah said in Rab's name: "Whoever is boastful, if he is a sage, his wisdom departs from him: if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him." R. Hillel, also 4th century, claims that they learn this from Deborah, for it is written, "The rulers ceased in Israel, they ceased, until that I arose, Deborah, I arose a mother in Israel"; then it is written, "Awake, awake, Deborah, awake, awake, utter a song" (Judg. 5:12). Rabbinic exegesis explains that, because Deborah boasted that she was a mother in Israel, she was punished and the Holy Spirit was taken from her.<sup>35</sup> Yet, how could the rabbis

31. L. Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), p. 23.

32. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 12 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), p. 84.

33. Josephus, *Op. cit.*, Bk. 5, chap. 5, p. 157.

34. J.P. Sullivan, *Women in Classical Literature* (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1988), pp. 5, 7.

35. T.B. *Pesahim* 66a.



have faulted her for referring to herself as “a mother in Israel”? The Sages do not tell us how else she should have referred to herself.

Deborah’s career further disturbs the halakhic views of the Sages. We must mention that they did approve of the manner in which she taught under a palm tree to avoid privacy with men,<sup>36</sup> but, on the other hand, the fact that she held a position as judge unsettles them. This fact is discussed at length, and the decision is reached that she was only a prophetess appointed by God’s word, but that she was not a judge. This interpretation of Deborah as prophetess rather than judge provides the basis for the rabbinic disqualification of women to act as judges.<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note the rabbinic desire to lessen the image of Deborah both as judge and leader. It is strange that two separate 4th century Amoraim both wish to attribute arrogance to Deborah and thereby diminish her towering leadership image. Even more surprising is the fact that not one sage came to her defense or suggested a different interpretation. This is not in keeping with the typical Talmudic discussion, in which there are both pro and con arguments. Why did no one give the contrary view that Scripture offers no evidence to indicate that she was arrogant?

To sum up the discussion about Deborah, it is beyond doubt that Scripture shows her as a full-fledged prophetess, teaching and leading the people of Israel in a time of crisis. The song that tradition attributes to her (Judg. 5) is considered by many scholars as one of the greatest ancient Hebrew poems. Nonetheless, although the rabbis acknowledge Deborah’s greatness as prophetess, they had difficulties in coming to terms with a female personality of her stature.

### *“Say Unto the Man”*

Whereas the Bible displays no surprise at women like Deborah and Huldah, the rabbinic sources marvel at such women leaders. This is indicative of the gender consciousness that pervades rabbinic thinking. The problem of why Huldah was chosen rather than her male contemporaries, Jeremiah or Zephaniah, is discussed at length. For example, Huldah, rather than Jeremiah, was consulted by King Josiah concerning the Book of Deuteronomy that the priest, Hilkiah, had found in the Temple, because Jeremiah was out of the city when the event took place. Huldah is also described by the Sages as a relative of Jeremiah, suggesting that he allowed her to engage in the activity as if she were under his tutelage.<sup>38</sup> These exegetes likewise suggest that the tragic forebodings of the Deuteronomic scroll called for a compassionate interpretation more common to women.<sup>39</sup> The rabbinic adage suggests

36. T.B. *Megillah* 14b.

37. T.B. *Niddah* 60b; *Tosafot Niddah* 49b, 50a.

38. T.B. *Megillah* 14b.

that Huldah's female quality of compassion, rather than the male quality of "intelligence," resulted in her calling. Obviously, this discussion implies a low regard for the counsel of woman in rabbinic law, and the comments reflect the general rabbinic tendency to understand or accept a woman's role only in the context of her functions as wife and mother.

This is not to suggest that all rabbinic sources reject women in leadership roles. The *Targum* on II Kings, Ch. 22 looks favorably upon Huldah's public role, and interprets the word, *bamishneh*, as a place of study where she instructed men in the study of the law. The later *Yalkut Shimoni* apparently was surprised to find Deborah acting as judge, prophetess and leader, and begins his comments with the rabbinic adage that the spirit of the Lord rests upon individuals according to their deeds and not because of race or gender. This paves the way for his description of Deborah as sitting under the palm tree and teaching Torah in public.<sup>40</sup>

In Deborah and Huldah we find two examples of women not only prophesying, but teaching in public places. Yet, the Sages have criticism rather than praise for the public activities of these two prophetesses, who, with their self-confidence and powerful personalities, saved the nation in times of crisis.

*"The Lord Raise the Horn of His Anointed"*

It is difficult to discover why the Sages decided to transform Hannah into a Biblical prophetess. Unlike Deborah and Huldah, Hannah displays no desire for leadership, but, rather, is a barren woman who longs for children. It is possible that she was chosen as a candidate for prophecy because, in her song, she foretells, according to the rabbis, the fall of the house of Saul and the rise of the house of David. The Zohar claims that Hannah's and Deborah's songs are the greatest ever written, unmatched by any man's.<sup>41</sup>

*"Hear the Word of Your Handmaid"*

The rabbis attributed to Abigail a prophecy dealing with an event in the life of David, but, in the opinion of the writer, Abigail's behavior in the Bible recalls the image of a Biblical wise woman rather than that of a prophetess.<sup>42</sup> She shows great skill and wisdom in her handling of David and in saving her husband's life and household. This, then, raises the question, why did the Sages designate her as prophetess and not as wise woman?

39. T.B. *Megillah* 14b; Rambam, *Sanhedrin* XXIII, 5-9. Note that a eunuch and an old man are disqualified from being Judges.

40. T.B. *Megillah* 14b.

41. Zohar, Leviticus 19b (Soncino Edition, vol. 4, 1984).

42. L. Bronner, "The Changing Face of Woman . . .," note 2.

The relationship between prophet and sage in rabbinic theology is a vast subject. For the purpose of this paper, let us point out that the Talmud states that when the spirit of prophecy departed from Israel, it went to the *Hakhamim*, the Sages.<sup>43</sup> The sage becomes the successor of the prophet. The rabbinic source, *Seder Olam*, states that, before the time of the Sages, the prophets prophesied through the medium of the Holy Spirit, but; "From now on incline your ear and listen to the words of the wise Sages."<sup>44</sup> The title *Hakham* (wise man) became a term restricted solely to the male elite of wise teachers and sages. In one place the Sages do apply the Aramaic term, *hakhmiya* (wise woman), to Miriam, but in this instance it means midwife.<sup>45</sup> In another place, the Midrash describes the daughters of Zelophehad with the adjectival term, *hakhmaniyot*.<sup>46</sup> This adjectival use of the word does not confer the same status on the bearer as the nominal use would. Since the Talmudic teachers take the title of "the Wise" for their elite class of male scholars and teachers, they do not apply it to women, not even to Biblical women, who are treated with greater respect than women of their own time. It is possibly because of this that, although Abigail emerges in the Bible as a wise woman, the Sages express their admiration for her activities by imputing to her prophecy in foretelling the tragic event of *Batsheva* that would happen in David's lifetime.

*"She Put on Royal Robes"*

What moved the rabbis to crown Queen Esther with prophecy? The book that she supposedly penned is surprisingly secular in tone, not once mentioning the name of God. With exegetical imagination, the Talmud explains that the verse, "Now it came to pass on the third day that Esther clothed herself in royalty" (Esth. 5:1) shows that the Holy Spirit of prophecy clothed her. With this explanation, Esther is ordained prophethood by the rabbis.

In keeping with the rabbis' scale of religious values, they first transform Esther into a pious Jewess observing the tenets of her faith in the manner of Daniel and his friends. She will not eat of the King's food, but, like Judith, will eat only herbs. Esther and her maids, who number seven to correspond to the days of the week, continue to keep track of time and observe the Sabbath.<sup>47</sup>

Surprisingly, Esther's sexuality, even more than her spirituality, pervades Talmudic and Midrashic sources. The Biblical scroll of Esther

43. T.B. *Yoma* 9b; T.B. *Sotah* 48b.

44. T.B. *Baba Bathra* 12a; *Seder Olam*, VI, p. 140.

45. M.D. Gross, *Ozar Ha-aggadah* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1986), see "Chacham."

46. *Sifre*, Numbers, Pinchas 27:1; T.B. *Baba Bathra* 115.

47. T.B. *Megillah* 13a; *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer* (Warsaw, 1852, reprinted Jerusalem); also stated in *The Scroll of Esther* that she did not partake of food.

does speak of her great beauty in three different verses (Esth. 1:11; 2:3, 7). This physical beauty makes her the sexual object of a king's desire, and it leads to her ability to save her nation. The rabbinic material on Esther's sexual appeal and appearance fills numerous pages and is very erotic in content. To the rabbis, Esther is one of the four most beautiful women ever created,<sup>48</sup> and she remained eternally young, like Sarah, the great matriarch.

Talmudic sources inform us that Esther sent a letter to the Sages requesting that they perpetuate her name, book, and festival for all generations.<sup>49</sup> This demand, as couched in this Talmudic tradition, echoes the Biblical account of her leadership aspirations (Esth. 9:29ff.). It is telling that, at first, the Sages refused her request, saying that a commemoration of her festival would lead to hatred against the Jews. But she refused to give up her demand, mentioning that she is already recorded in the annals of the Persians, and wishes to be remembered by her own people. Eventually, they yield. Esther is depicted as acting in this recorded instance in an unusual capacity for women, especially in rabbinic literature, yet her actions were accepted by the Sages.

### *Conclusion*

Based on the material presented here, the following conclusions can be drawn concerning the rabbinic Sages' views on Biblical prophetesses: they attributed a variety of functions to the persons whom they designated as prophetesses. According to Brown, Driver and Briggs, prophecy includes religious instruction with occasional predictions. The *neviah*, in ancient times, was regarded as endowed with the gift of song, and the later type was consulted for the word of God.<sup>50</sup> While the Talmudic scholars do not classify the prophetess in this way, they do include these definitions indirectly in their study. Sarah is a prophetess because she speaks with God and gives advice to Abraham. Miriam qualifies as a prophetess because she predicts the career of her brother Moses, and is instrumental in leading the people from slavery to freedom. Although she sins by slandering Moses, she is forgiven because she is held in such high esteem.

Deborah and Huldah seem primarily to be included because the Bible calls them prophetesses, but the rabbis do not discuss their prophetic functions, and sharply criticize, rather than praise, their personal demeanor. The Sages seem to have difficulty in relating to powerful women who are leaders of the people and who do not present the tra-

48. T.B. *Megillah* 15a.

49. T.B. *Megillah* 7a. The Biblical book makes reference to a similar letter sent to all the Jews, in Esther 9:29f.

50. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), p. 612.

ditional image of wife and mother. In addition, the rabbis were, no doubt, very perturbed by the fact that both Deborah and Huldah overshadowed their male contemporaries — unlike Miriam, who was on a par with Aaron, but less significant than Moses and, therefore, less disturbing.

In contrast to Deborah and Huldah, who are paradigms of prophetic leadership, Hannah and Abigail did not upset the rabbis because they did not enter the male realm of leadership. Hannah's prophetic function is manifested in her song, in which she prays and predicts future events in the history of the nation, while Abigail also foretells events in David's life.

The rabbis saw Esther as a prophetess because she robed herself in royalty (i.e., the spirit of prophecy) which, accordingly, strengthened her and enabled her to wield the power to save her people. Unlike the other six women, Esther did not speak with God, sing a song, foretell the future, teach like Huldah, or lead like Deborah. No doubt the word prophetess was applied to her because she was an important woman, a queen, who delivered her people from oppression.

The material presented here, it must be stressed, exemplifies rabbinic attitudes toward an elite, the Biblical prophetesses. Although they tend to describe their activities with great respect and interest, nevertheless, they tend to attribute to these Biblical women, even the finest, the negative characteristics ascribed to the female gender as a whole. This is best illustrated by the midrash that states that Sarah was an eavesdropper, Miriam was a talebearer, etc.<sup>51</sup> This shows that the rabbis, despite their admiration and adoration for Biblical prophetesses, could not divorce these figures from their general attitudes toward women.

---

51. *Genesis Rabba*, 45:5.

# Miriam: Guilty Or Not Guilty?

NAOMI GRAETZ

AT THE END OF THE TORAH PORTION OF *Beha'alotkha* (Numbers 8-12) we read: "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married . . ." (Numbers 12:1). The rabbis wonder why the Hebrew word used for "spoke," *vatedaber*, is in the singular form, rather than *vayedabru*, in the plural form, since the text says that Miriam *and* Aaron spoke. They also ask why Miriam, a woman, precedes Aaron, since "ladies first" was not a principle in ancient times. The chapter is problematic, and many questions can be raised after studying it. First let us consider it:

## Chapter 12<sup>1</sup>

1) When they were in Hazeroth, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married: "He married a Cushite woman!"

2) They said, "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" The Lord heard it.

3) Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other man on earth.

4) Suddenly the Lord called to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the Tent of Meeting." So the three of them went out.

5) The Lord came down in a pillar of cloud, stopped at the entrance of the Tent, and called out, "Aaron and Miriam!" The two of them came forward.

6) And he said, "Hear these My words: When a prophet of the Lord arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream.

7) Not so with my servant, Moses; he is trusted throughout My household.

8) With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of the Lord. How, then, did you not shrink from speaking against My servant Moses!"

9) Still incensed with them, the Lord departed.

10) As the cloud withdrew from the Tent, there was Miriam strick-

---

1. *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (Phil.: Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

NAOMI GRAETZ teaches EFL at Ben Gurion University, writes contemporary midrash aggadah, and is on the national board of the Israel Women's Network.

en with snow-white scales! When Aaron turned toward Miriam, he saw that she was stricken with scales [leprosy].

11) And Aaron said to Moses, "O my Lord, account not to us the sin which we committed in our folly.

12) Let her [Miriam] not be as one dead, who emerges from his [sic] mother's womb with half his flesh eaten away."

13) So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "O God, pray heal her!"

14) But the Lord said to Moses, "If her father spat in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut out of camp for seven days, and then let her be readmitted."

15) So Miriam was shut out of camp seven days; and the people did not march on until Miriam was readmitted.

16) After that the people set out from Hazeroth and encamped in the wilderness of Paran.

Some of the questions that arise about this text are the following:

1) Who was this Cushite woman to whom Miriam and Aaron referred?

2) Why was Moses silent when accused by Miriam and Aaron?

3) Why did God have to defend Moses' honor in such a drastic way?

4) Why was only Miriam punished and not Aaron?

5) Why leprosy?

6) Does the Bible downplay Miriam's importance to keep the focus on her brother, Moses?

7) Finally, did Miriam and Aaron pose a real threat to Moses?

I suggest that Miriam was punished with leprosy because women in the Biblical world were not supposed to be leaders of men, and that women with initiative were reproved when they asserted themselves with the only weapon they had, their power of language: a power which could be used viciously and was, therefore, called *lashon ha-ra*, literally, evil tongue.

Miriam is recalled in the Book of Deuteronomy (24:9), where it is stated: "Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the way as you came forth out of Egypt." She is "a marked woman, a warning for generations to come," a woman so important "that detractors tabooed her to death, seeking to bury her forever in disgrace."<sup>2</sup> Yet she is also a woman whom the rabbis chose to see as a positive role model: an advocate of the Biblical command to mankind to "be fruitful and multiply," specifically, in criticizing Moses for not having sexual

2. Phyllis Tribble, "Bringing Miriam Out of the Shadows," *Bible Review*, Volume V, Number 1 (February, 1989): 23.



relations with his wife, and in encouraging the Israelite males to marry while in Egypt despite Pharaoh's decrees against Jewish male babies.

### *Examples of Praise*

First, let us look at the many examples of the Miriam whom the rabbis admire. One instance is their explication of the Biblical passage in Numbers 12:14f., where it is written clearly that it was *the people* who did not journey until Miriam was returned to them. The rabbis, however, say it was the Lord who waited for her. Not only that, but the "Holy One, blessed be He, said: "I am a priest, I shut her up, and I shall declare her clean."<sup>3</sup> If God, portrayed as concerned doctor, intervenes in Miriam's case and personally treats her illness, surely it follows that Miriam was someone to be reckoned with.

There are many midrashim which have to do with Miriam's well, which is said to have been one of the ten things created during the twilight before the first Sabbath of the creation.<sup>4</sup> One of the few poems or songs of the Bible is read by many rabbis as referring to this well:

Spring up, O well — sing to it —  
The well which the chieftains dug,  
Which the nobles of the people started  
With maces, with their own staffs (Numbers 21:17-19).

Since the verse following Miriam's reported death (Numbers 20:1) is followed by a statement that there was no water for the congregation (20:2), the rabbis write that Miriam's gift to us after her death was *her* song, which could cause the waters of her well to flow. The proviso was that the right person had to know how to address the well to get it to give water. Moses, who knew only how to hit the rock, was not the person; clearly a woman's touch was needed. The rabbis have actually located her well in Tiberias, opposite the middle gate of an ancient synagogue, to which lepers go in order to be cured.<sup>5</sup>

In Exodus 15, Miriam is called a prophet. Though the Bible does not relate any examples of her prophesies, the rabbis interpret the passage, "And His sister stood afar off" (Exodus 2:4), to mean that she stood afar "to know what would be the outcome of her prophecy," because she had told her parents that her "mother was destined to give birth to a son who will save Israel." That prophecy, they say, is "the meaning of: 'And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel' (Ex. 15:20)."<sup>6</sup>

A fifth midrash concerns the virtuous midwives who saved the Israelite babies from the wicked Pharaoh. The rabbis decided that the

3. *Midrash Rabbah* VI. 9 on Deuteronomy.

4. B.T. *Pesahim* 54a.

5. *Midrash Rabbah* VI. 11 on Deuteronomy.

6. *Midrash Rabbah* VI. 14 on Deuteronomy.

Hebrew midwives, Shifrah and Puah, were none other than Yocheved and the very capable five year old Miriam. In this guise she performed pleasing (*shafrah*) acts to God, and lifted (*hofi'ah*, from *puah*) her face against Pharaoh, whereupon Pharaoh became so angry that he sought to slay her. In this same midrash her father, Amram, is shown as a coward who stopped having intercourse with his wife, and even divorced her because of Pharaoh's decree to kill the baby boys who were born to the Israelites. In this story, Miriam pointed out to him that "your decree is more severe than that of Pharaoh; for Pharaoh decreed only concerning the male children, and you decree upon males and females alike." As a result, Amram took his wife back, and his example was followed by all the Israelites.<sup>7</sup> In this midrash, Miriam is praised for outsmarting her father, and for encouraging the people to be fruitful and multiply so that they will survive.

To the rabbis, Miriam is a perfect role model, except for one thing; she is not married and does not have any children. So, to fix that, the midrash explains that the meaning of the passage, "And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that He built them houses" (Exodus 1:21), is that "they were founders of a royal family." They show that Miriam founded a royal family, with David descending from her. The genealogy is a bit complex, but, essentially, Miriam marries Caleb, who begets Hur, who has Uri who begets Bezalel, leading ultimately to King David.<sup>8</sup>

Many problems are solved by this marriage: Amram's line is continued, Caleb, the faithful spy is rewarded, and Moses' children are written out of Jewish history. But, most important, Miriam is not an anomalous, unmarried spinster any more; rather, she is a happily married mother and wife whose offspring bring fame and glory to her. If not for the incident when Miriam asserts herself and attacks Moses (God's choice), Miriam would be one of the few women in the Bible about whom the rabbis have nothing bad to say.<sup>9</sup> That this is not the case we see in the examples of castigation concerning her punishment of leprosy.

### *Examples of Castigation*

In Numbers 12, it is not clear who is the Cushite woman, and whether Miriam's case against Moses was just or not. Both she and Aaron claim that God speaks through them as well as through Moses. They both speak up against God's chosen leader. Yet, the popular interpretation is that Miriam was behind it. God, the father figure, reprimands them both, but punishes only Miriam with a skin disease. The fact that Miriam is punished and Aaron is untouched is a discriminatory

7. *Leviticus Rabbah*, XVII.3.

8. B.T. *Sotah* 12a and *Exodus Rabbah* 1:17.

9. B.T. *Ber.* 19a.

decision against her, and has the effect of ending Miriam's "legitimate public aspirations".<sup>10</sup>

To see this we must look at the story's textual context, which deals with the people's discontent and their questions concerning authority. We see this in the texts both before and after chapter 12. Chapter 11 depicts the people's popular rebellion based on general dissatisfaction and, in particular, over the boring daily menu of manna. Moses has trouble handling the people, and, right after this episode, God tells Moses to share the burden of his leadership with the 70 elders. During this period, when God's spirit has descended on the elders, Eldad and Medad also experience God's spirit and, unlike Aaron's sons (Nadav and Avihu, who were punished with death on a similar occasion), these latter-day prophets (possibly Moses' half-brothers according to one midrash)<sup>11</sup> are rewarded with Moses' protection and the famous statement "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets!"

In the chapter following *Beha'alotkha*, we read the story of the twelve spies or scouts who go on a reconnaissance mission to study the Land of Canaan, ten of whom come back with slanderous comments about the Land. The midrash connects the two texts in its exposition of the passage: "Send thou men, that they may spy out."<sup>12</sup>

First we read, "And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses (Num. 12: 1) and after that, "Send thou men." What reason had Scripture for saying, after the incident of Miriam, "Send thou men?" The fact is that the Holy One, blessed be He, foresaw that the spies would utter a slander about the Land. Said the Holy One, blessed be He: "They shall not say, 'We did not know the penalty for slander.'" The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore placed this section next to the other — for Miriam had spoken against her brother and had been smitten with leprosy — in order that all might know the penalty for slander, and that if people were tempted to speak slander they might reflect what had happened to Miriam. Nevertheless, the spies did not want to learn.<sup>13</sup>

It is actually possible to connect the three texts (Miriam, Eldad, and the spies), since anyone who speaks badly of God or His chosen is guilty of slander. According to the midrash,<sup>14</sup> it is through casual gossip that Miriam finds out from Zipporah, Moses' wife, about the high price (Moses' failure to engage in marital relations) of being married to a public figure, and, thus, there is a connection between slander and rebellion. At any rate, there are clearly others besides Miriam who prophesy, together with Moses, or criticize him. Some of them are not

10. Edward R. Zweiback Levenson, "Sexegesis: Miriam in the Desert", *Tikkun*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb., 1989): 96.

11. Devora Steinmetz, "A Portrait of Miriam in Rabbinic Midrash," *Prooftexts* 8 (1988): 35-65. Eldad and Medad prophesy in the camp in contrast to Moses, who prophesies in the Tent of Meeting.

12. Numbers 13:2.

13. *Numbers Rabbah*, XVI.6-7.

14. *Sifre Zuta* 12:1.

punished but are praised (like Eldad and Medad), while others, like the spies, are punished in that none of them (except for Caleb and Joshua) gets to the Promised Land. But this still does not explain why Miriam, and not Aaron, comes in for most of the criticism.

Let us recall the midrash where Miriam's father, Amram, is portrayed as a coward who stopped having intercourse with his wife, and divorced her after Pharaoh's decree to kill all the baby boys who were born to the Israelites. As a result of Miriam's advice, Amram took his wife back, and his example was followed by all the Israelites.<sup>15</sup> In this midrash, Miriam was praised for her assertiveness. Yet, in a midrash which has the same theme, and starts by portraying Miriam "as one who is concerned about the observance of the commandments and Jewish survival . . .,"<sup>16</sup> Miriam is punished for the same act of assertiveness. In this midrash, Zipporah complains to Miriam that, since her husband Moses was chosen by God, he no longer sleeps with her. Miriam consults with her brother, Aaron, and it turns out that although they, too, have received Divine revelations, they — unlike Moses — did not separate themselves from their mates. Furthermore, they claim that Moses abstains to show that he is better than they are, and, in Miriam's view, Moses, rather than serving as a "model of the observance of the commandment concerning procreation,"<sup>17</sup> abstains from conjugal joys out of pride.

Why did the rabbis go along with Miriam in the case of Amram her father, yet punish her here? The rabbis themselves ask this question. The answer has to do with R. Judah b. Levi's saying:

Anyone who is so arrogant as to speak against one greater than himself causes the plagues to attack him. And if you do not believe this, look to the pious Miriam as a warning to all slanderers.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, one can stand for procreation as long as one does not attack the leader for not procreating! The leader is different; there are other criteria by which he is to be judged. Devorah Steinmetz, in an important article, argues that the rabbis excused Moses from the commandment of "be fruitful and multiply," and agreed that it was correct for him to dedicate himself totally to God, and that to be an effective leader he had to separate himself from the people.<sup>19</sup>

This is not Miriam's and Aaron's concept of what leadership should be, and, if one reads the Bible carefully, there are enough hints that Moses' distancing himself from the people may ultimately have been the cause of his downfall. However, the rabbis do accept the justice

15. *Exodus Rabbah*, I.13.

16. Norman J. Cohen "Miriam's Song: A Modern Midrashic Reading," *JUDAISM*, Volume 33, 1984: 185.

17. Levenson, *Op. cit.*

18. *Midrash Rabbah* VI. 9 on Deuteronomy.

19. Steinmetz, *Op. cit.*

of punishment by leprosy, for that is what is ordained for those who speak ill of their neighbors. Presumably it would have been proper, or less objectionable, if Miriam had spoken about her concerns to Moses directly, rather than about him, behind his back.

According to the rabbis, Aaron became leprous as well, but only for a moment, because his sin was not as great. Why wasn't Aaron's considered as great a sin? Because Miriam was behind it all. On *that* the rabbis all seem to agree. The rabbis explicate the passage, "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses . . ." in such a way that Aaron is a passive accessory rather than an active co-agent. They reason that malicious gossip is to be associated with women, who have nothing better to do with their time, as we see in a very revealing midrash:

R. Isaac said: It is like the snake that bites everyone who passes by, and it is surprising that anyone is willing to associate with it. So Moses said: "Miriam spoke slander against me; that I can understand, since women as a rule are talkative . . ." <sup>20</sup>

Another example of this bias against women, is the saying of R. Levi:

Women possess the four following characteristics: they are greedy, inquisitive, envious, and indolent. . . . The rabbis add two more characteristics; they are querulous and gossips. Whence do we know that they are gossips? For it is written, "And Miriam spoke." <sup>21</sup>

The usual punishment associated with slander is leprosy because leprosy is also associated with quarantine, and lepers must be removed from the camp or city. One is in isolation, husband from wife, child from parent, friends from each other. This is also the effect of *lashon ha-ra*, the evil tongue, which causes separation. *Lashon ha-ra*, done often in secrecy, has the effect of isolating the victim from the rest of society, often without her/him even knowing why.

This sin was so egregious that the rabbis inserted two prayers about it into the daily silent recitation; one, at the conclusion ("keep my tongue from evil and my tongue from speaking guile") and one, a curse ("there shall be no hope for those who slander"). The rabbis think of slander as worse than rape, and equivalent to murder: the rapist must pay 50 *selas* to the victim, whereas he who slanders must pay 100 *selas* to the victim. <sup>22</sup>

One might think that here is a case of over-reaction: surely the punishment for slander is not to be more severe than for rape. However, in the eyes of the rabbis, since the rapist also has to marry the victim, and cannot ever divorce her, there is some kind of closure, whereas one never knows what the ripple effects of slander may be. The rabbis recognized the power of the spoken word to build or ruin human re-

20. *Midrash Rabbah* VI. 11 on Deuteronomy.

21. *Midrash Rabbah* VI. 11 on Deuteronomy.

22. *Mishnah Arakhin* 3.5.

lationships, and considered the tongue the “elixir of life”<sup>23</sup> and the primary source of good and evil.<sup>24</sup>

The rabbis also tell us that the blame for *lashon ha-ra* falls equally on those making their decisions on the basis of what they hear. And *lashon ha-ra* is prohibited even when the remarks are true.<sup>25</sup> It is written about those who utter slander: “they begin by speaking well of one and conclude by speaking ill.”<sup>26</sup>

The effects of slander (or what we might want to call, today, character assassination) are deadly. They are like that of the “serpent who bites into one limb and whose poison travels to all the limbs. *Lashon ha-ra* slays teller, listener and subject.”<sup>27</sup>

Character assassination of leaders or of God’s chosen is, therefore, surely very serious — how serious can be seen in this final midrash, based on the passage from Ecclesiastes, 5:5: “Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt.”

R. Manni interpreted the verse as alluding to Miriam. . . . Miriam spoke slander with her mouth, but all her limbs were punished. R. Joshua learned: A word for a *sela*, but silence for two *selas*. Rabbi Judah HaNasi said: “Best of all is silence; as we have learned in the Ethics of the Fathers: All my days I grew up among the Sages, and I have found nothing better for a person than silence.”<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps here lies the clue. Silence is a virtue; yet to women is attributed the gift of speech. In *Kiddushin* 49b, it is said that of the ten measures of conversation that were given to the world, nine were given to women.<sup>29</sup> If silence is the supreme virtue, surely the nine measures of conversation are a dubious gift at best!

The punishment for *lashon ha-ra* does not distinguish between men and women. However, the rabbis stack the deck against women. They predict that 90 percent of the time they will be doing the talking. This, then, leads the rabbis to expect the worst from women — even to assuming that when the Bible says that Miriam and Aaron spoke, it was principally Miriam who was at fault!

The rabbis glorified Miriam when she asserted herself to defend the values of nurturance and motherhood, but they disparaged her when she stepped out of line and spoke up to challenge Moses’ authority.

Are rabbinic attitudes different today? Let us examine a fairly modern interpretation of the text, which glosses over the inequity of Miriam’s punishment by minimizing it. Rabbi Gunther Plaut, in his com-

23. *Leviticus Rabbah* XVI.2.

24. *Leviticus Rabbah* XXXIII:1.

25. *Leviticus* 19:16.

26. *Numbers Rabbah* XVI.17.

27. *Leviticus Rabbah* XXVI.2.

28. *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* V, 1.

29. The context in the Talmud makes clear that it is negative.

mentary on the Torah,<sup>30</sup> writes that it was Aaron who was more severely disciplined than Miriam. Though, to the ordinary reader of text, this goes against the grain of the *peshat* (the self-evident meaning), Plaut points out that Miriam is punished only corporally whereas Aaron is punished mentally, a suffering which is more intense. How so?

1) First, because Aaron suffers guilt when he sees Miriam disfigured hideously, while he is let off free. Plaut writes: "The hurt of seeing a dear one suffer is often far greater than one's own physical agony."<sup>31</sup>

2) Second, because Aaron has to humiliate himself before his younger brother by begging Moses' forgiveness, and by asking him to intercede with God on Miriam's behalf.

Plaut asserts that Miriam's pain is short-lived and, like most physical ailments, quickly forgotten once she is healed, whereas Aaron's punishment probably leaves deep scars. He agrees that Miriam's leprosy is a warning to the people, that slander and rebellion are evil, but argues that the sight of Aaron, the High Priest, bowing down before Moses and begging his pardon is a warning which was equally potent and "surely more memorable."<sup>32</sup>

I am not arguing that Plaut's reading is wrong or even narrow-minded, but I hope it is clear that in emphasizing Aaron's pain it is minimizing Miriam's. Like all the jokes about the poor expectant father in the hospital waiting room, who suffers so from the traumatic experience while his wife is calmly going through the process of childbirth, Plaut's reading takes the limelight away from Miriam.

This type of modern interpretation assaults our sense of the meaning of the text by smoothing over the injustice inherent in the original story to make an apologetic statement. Can men and women who experience a conflict with those who continue to interpret the Biblical text in such a biased manner, do anything about it? Certainly. One can insist on the partnership model as the traditional Jewish midrashic approach to text. Its starting point is that the Bible is "sacred" text, but that there is no monopoly on its interpretation. New insights are welcome, and, the more diverse they are, the more enrichment and understanding of God's purpose.

We must start imaginatively re-engaging with our sacred texts, by writing midrash.<sup>33</sup> Only in that way can *all* voices, not only a few, be part of the partnership. Then, we hope, different views will be voiced, and will not be dismissed as just gossip or as *lashon ha-ra*, but welcomed as the "beginning of moral inquiry . . . [and] self understanding."<sup>34</sup>

30. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (UAHC, 1981).

31. *Ibid.*, p. 1101.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 1102.

33. See Seymour Mayne's poem, "Down Here," in *Viewpoints*, a Montreal newspaper, XVII, 1, 1989:8 or my unpublished collection of midrashim, *Male and Female S/He Created Them*, available by request from the author.

34. Phyllis Rose, *Parallel Lives* (Vintage, 1983), p. 9.



# *Faust and the Human Condition: Duality and the Teaching of the Sages on the Two Spirits*

MORDECAI PALDIEL

Two souls, alas, dwell in my breast,  
Each seeks to sever from the other.  
The one with robust love's desires,  
Clings to the world with clutching limbs.  
The other fiercely rises from the dust  
To the high ancestral regions (*Faust*, I, 1112-7).<sup>1</sup>

INTERPRETATIONS OF GOETHE'S FAUST cover a wide spectrum of the various disciplines in the humanities. For some, Faust personifies Romantic man, yearning for emotional freedom. *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* were the Romantic catchwords for an authentic lifestyle — in contrast to the aridness of pedantic intellectuals which stifled the mind and thwarted the individual's quest for self-realization. Faust's soliloquy: "You will never conquer it unless you feel it" (533-4), certainly bears this out.

Much has also been written about Faust representing an appeal for intellectual freedom. In contrast to the previous theme, Goethe's drama is presented as a critique against an overzealous attachment to antiquated sentiments. Faust was, accordingly, the product of the Enlightenment struggling to overcome the limitations of the medieval mentality (still lurking in the recesses of the mind), and represented the individual's longing for knowledge, coupled with the determination to subject enshrined beliefs to the test of scientific truths. This "enlightened" Faust is, of course, incompatible with the "emotional" Faust of the Romantics, for the clear reason that an addiction to emotional liberties does not go hand-in-hand with a strictly rational type of behavior.

Still another interpretation is given by the psychological school. Faust is apprehended as representing man's determination to uncover the mysteries of his subconscious mind, to lay bare the hidden impulses which sometimes suddenly propel him into unpredictable deeds. According to this view, Faust's anguished life is an echo of what Freud

1. All references to *Faust* herein are to the relevant lines in Book I.

---

MORDECAI PALDIEL is Director of the Department for the Righteous Among the Nations at Yad VaShem, Jerusalem.

later explained as man's neurotic condition, especially governing the behavior of modern man.<sup>2</sup>

Goethe's own opinion on Faust varied over the years. The hero in Part I of the drama bears little resemblance to the Faust of Part II, written many years later. In Part II, Faust's personality has undergone a drastic change; he is no longer given to rash emotional outbursts with each passing situation, but is more thoughtful, reserved and self-controlled.

In his letters to Eckermann, written close to his death, Goethe continued to speculate on the significance of the Faust tragedy. There is no doubt that it occupied his thoughts through the greater part of his life (several decades separate the original *Urfaust* from the final *Faust II*); one may doubt that the "liberated" Faust with which Part II ends, saved by "the eternal Feminine — *das Ewig Weibliche*," truly represented Goethe's final verdict on the resolution of the Faust mystery. The various Faust personalities are, perhaps, a testimony of Goethe's continuous struggle with the riddle of the human predicament, a condition for which he, like others before and after him, failed to provide a satisfactory explanation.

Limiting myself to Part I, I will attempt to view the Faustian drama, not as an isolated mental agony afflicting a sole person, but an existential dilemma coterminous with the human condition as such. Faust will be shown to represent man in his frustrating attempts to come to grips with the mysterious nature of a double-edged behavioral inclination, whose full meaning continues to elude us. As such, every individual has a "Faust" problem of sorts; he goes through a comparable, if not always identical, excruciating search for a balance between what is and what he feels ought to be. In this difficult endeavor, man contends with unknown mental forces which, left to themselves, would soon tear him apart. All interpretations of Faust address themselves to this situation of conflict in the very heart of human nature. We presently wish to highlight the unique psychic nature of this conflict and, in this endeavor, we will draw an analogy from the Jewish tradition.

The various elements in this intractable mental conflict may be divided into two distinct groups; they have sometimes been schematized under the rubric of Good versus Evil. The presence of such duality is boldly asserted in this article's opening excerpt from the Faust tragedy.

One of the clearest expositions of the principle of duality in man in ancient times is the rabbinic teaching of the two spirits — specifically, the teaching of the *Yezer Ha-ra*, commonly translated as the Evil Impulse

2. For a review of some literary themes, see Cyrus Hamlin, ed., *Faust: A Tragedy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976); Stuart Atkins, *Goethe's Faust: A Literary Analysis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1958); and R.M.S. Heffner, et al., *Goethe's Faust* (Boston: Heath, 1954).

or Inclination, and the *Yezer Ha-Tov*, or Good Impulse. As early as the first century C.E., the rabbinic Sages alleged that a state of strife prevailed in man between two dominant impulses, and warned that this contest might easily end with the dominance of one over the other. Such a result, they felt, could spell man's physical or moral undoing. The majority of the Sages counseled a middle course, an equilibrium — fluctuating and in need of constant sustenance — between these two contending forces, for the physical and spiritual well-being of man. We shall have an opportunity to discuss this at greater length, but, first, a few words on a principal theme, alluded to in Goethe's *Faust*, which is closely allied with our subsequent analysis of the rabbinic teaching of the two spirits.

The term *Streben*, as used by 19th and 20th century Romantics, is interpreted as the animating principle in life. As such, it is held to be the source of creativity. When lacking this drive, man sinks into inertia. But *Streben* is even more than that. As defined by a current German dictionary, the term implies a concentration of "one's whole thoughts and activity on a clear-cut object and, through the co-opting of all means, attempting to realize the desired thing" (*Duden*, Vol. 8, 1964). Though an irrational drive, *Streben* is conceived as an object-oriented urge which can take many forms: urge for power, prestige, honor, wealth, and, also, for a greater consciousness (Vol. 2, 1963). The *Brockhaus* (1965) dictionary renders a psychological definition; both conscious and subconscious impulses are at play in the realization of such goal-oriented drives.

The term "Faustian" (*faustisch* in German) was closely connected with *Streben*. *Brockhaus* defines "*faustisch*" as a striving "for the realization of an all-encompassing infinite condition," in which case it would appear to represent a purposeless striving for unrealizable goals. With Spengler's use of the term, "*faustisch*" became interchangeable with Western man, and, in a narrow sense, with post-1870 German *Kultur*.<sup>3</sup> It came to symbolize the restless spirit of a generation that left in its wake two calamitous wars. This "Faustian" element in Faust's character (in the sense explained by *Brockhaus*) remains the crux of Faust's problems. This endless and bewildering chasing after imaginary goals is a *Streben* gone beserk. *Streben* itself is not condemned, only its uncontrollable misappropriation.

Goethe was aware of the necessity of the *Streben* urge in life, and sometimes referred to it as the "daemonic," though not in the pejorative sense. Thus —

The daemonic . . . is that which cannot be comprehended through reason and logic . . . It manifests itself as a fully positive force.<sup>4</sup>

3. Hans Schwerte, *Faust und das Faustische: ein Kapitel deutscher Ideologie* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1962), p. 179.

4. Charlotte S. Streisinger, *The Devil Within: A Study of the Role of the Devil in Goethe's*

As such, it was not to be confused with the devil. "No . . . , Mephistophiles is too much of a negative figure," Goethe wrote to Eckermann in 1827.<sup>5</sup>

The "daemonic" as the stimulant to *Streben* is the irritant factor in man's mental construct which produces spontaneous creative urges, and may lead to extreme changes of one's temperament, causing tumultuous and irregular reactions. The daemonic is both benevolent and malevolent, depending on how it is wielded by man. As creativity's main motivating force, it neutralizes feelings of shame and doubt which inhibit the individual person, substituting, in their stead, illusionary images and an exaggerated self-confidence. Potentially destructive, it is no less crucial to originality and inventiveness. Goethe felt that this element was especially active in the behavior of exceptionally talented persons.<sup>6</sup>

As stated, Goethe declined to associate the daemonic with the devil per se, but he was not always consistent on this point. In 1827 he wrote: "That which we call evil is but the other side of the good . . . The spirit that negates, and the urge for the paradoxical, is buried in us all."<sup>7</sup> And in a rare self-disclosure, he used Mephisto as a cathartic figure to unburden himself from the twin elements present in his soul. As he admitted, "Mephisto's scorn and harsh irony represent a part of my own being."<sup>8</sup>

In *Faust*, the devil represents the other and adversary element operating in man; it is intrinsic to human nature, not an extraneous source.<sup>9</sup> Mephisto appears, merely, as the instigator of a daemonic element which is already present, not its originator. He thrives on man's inborn capacity for self-inflicted harm by allowing the daemonic to get the better of him through a display of "faustian" *Streben*.

Fate has given him a spirit,  
That constantly whips him forward, unrestrained.  
And even if he weren't the devil's pawn,  
He still would be cut down! (1866-7)

Even God is made to admit a certain tolerance of the devil ("I hold no hatred for the likes of you" — 337), and permits — even encourages — the devil's activity as an annoying irritant in man, so as to prod him to creative deeds (343). Mephisto forecasts the end of the world should he disappear (4092-4). Is it any wonder that he describes himself as "A part of that power which always seeks to fashion evil and always effects the good" (1336).

*Faust*, *Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov*, and *Mann's Doktor Faustus* (Master's Thesis, Cornell University, 1951), p. 40.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

We thus see the indispensability of the devil as a catalyst to man's *Streben*. Mephisto's role, in suspending man's proclivity for self-indulgence in favor of a restless activity, is the precondition for a life of *Streben*. The daemonic prompts man to experiment with everything imaginable — some of which will, undoubtedly, mislead him. "Man errs, as long as he strives" (317), God muses to himself. Never mind — man cannot forego a life of *Streben* without inviting stagnation. "Man's activity easily slides into slumber" (340). Man needs the daemonic to stimulate his suggestive faculty; inspiration, ingenuity and originality are conceivable only as a result of the effect of this irritant factor — "Which provokes and, in the form of the devil, leads to activity" (343).

At first, Mephisto tries to meet all of Faust's demands (1656-7, 1674), but Mephisto's seemingly endless scope is not without limits. Confronted with an insatiable lust for life by his client, Mephisto demurs: "Such vastness was meant only for a God!" (1780-1). Only a poet's imagination can find the suitable words to express such unquenchable thirst (1789-90); but poetic flair is not always equivalent to practical consideration. The human condition presupposes certain limitations to the possible. "You are, all things considered, what you are," (1806) Mephisto admonishes — a stark reminder concerning Faust's limitations, paradoxically voiced by the devil. In disregarding this truism, Faust is courting disaster.

Thus, in the *Faust* tragedy, Mephisto appears mostly as an external catalyst to an inborn *Streben* already present in Faust, and less a personification of that *Streben* itself. Consequently, the devil pact is more of an arrangement between two diametrically opposed sides of the same personality — an agreement to subordinate one side to the cause of the other.

Admittedly, we should not overlook Mephisto's basically negative role in the unfolding drama. He is "a part of the Darkness (but note the intertwining of the positive with the negative) that gave birth to the Light" (1350). He can never escape his pernicious origin. He is at his best when giving vent to his inherent destructiveness; in the words of the gloating Mephisto: "I am the spirit that forever negates. And rightly so. For all that have arisen from the void deserve to go under" (1338-40). Mephisto's composite character (the darkness that produces the light) is perhaps an indication of a dual nature in the devil, as well. He, too, is susceptible to the daemonic in himself. Mephisto's disposition is also conditioned by his handling of his *Yezer Ha-ra*, or so it seems. This tends further to minimize Mephisto's importance in the unfolding tragedy. The devil is no match against man's *Streben*, gone berserk.

Viewed from a different perspective, man harbors an elemental force which can propel him to higher levels of consciousness, to the realization of his psychic self. It turns no less equally destructive when

mismanaged, when given free rein and allowed to dictate man's behavior, solely for its own gratification.

\* \* \*

This perplexing duality in man's condition, mysterious and terrifying, is what stamps the human predicament: a dilemma between what one believes to be the ideal state and what life teaches him to be obtainable, the ought and the is. It has both blessed and afflicted mankind from earliest days; all religions address themselves to this issue. The rabbis viewed it in terms of a contest between two diametrically opposed wills, of *Yezer* (inclinations, but better rendered as passions), given by God at birth and relentlessly pursuing and provoking man to his last breath. The solution to the riddle of how to live a successful and happy life is considered to lie in the proper combination of these two elements. This rabbinic teaching now needs to be further clarified.

The *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1972) defines *Yezer Ha-ra* (under "Inclination, Good and Evil") as an impulse which, left to itself, would lead to man's undoing. Not intrinsically evil, it corresponds somewhat to man's untamed nature, to his appetites and passions (especially, but not solely, sexual).

The teaching on the *Yezer Ha-ra* originated in the rabbinic academies of the first centuries C.E., and can be found in various rabbinic sources of that period (Midrash, Mishnah and Talmud). The Sages (the term for the rabbinic expositors of that period) were unanimous on the origin of the *Yezer Ha-ra*. It was antecedent to man, even to Adam, and was injected into the body at birth. In a discussion between R. Judah (circa 200 C.E.) and an anonymous official, this point is conceded by both — and documented elsewhere as well.<sup>10</sup> The *Yezer Ha-ra*, accordingly, has priority over the *Yezer Ha-tov* (good inclination), since the latter appears only during a person's maturation and coincides with the attainment of majority, interpreted as the person's obligation to place him/herself under the guidance of the Torah and accept full responsibility for the Torah's observance. The Good Inclination is, henceforward, identified with the Torah, which serves as a bulwark against the ravages of the Evil Inclination.

A clear line is drawn between the *Yezer Ha-ra* and one's natural life instincts. The *Yezer Ha-ra* urges, taunts and provokes man to action, oblivious to the consequences on its prey of its unending prodding. As such, it is found even in children, but is lacking in animals. The following statement illustrates this point:

When an infant, still in his cradle, puts his hand on a serpent or scorpion and is stung, it is brought on only by the evil impulse within him. When he puts his hand on glowing coals and is scorched, it is brought on only

10. T.B. *Sanhedrin* 91b. A contrasting opinion: "the first seminal drop a man puts into a woman is the evil impulse!" *The Fathers According to R. Nathan*, Judah Goldin, tr. (New Haven: Yale University, 1955), p. 85.

by the evil impulse within him. For it is the evil impulse which drives him headlong. But come and look at a kid or lamb — as soon as it sees a well it starts back! For there is no evil impulse in beasts.<sup>11</sup>

Lacking discrimination, the *Yezer Ha-ra* instigates the child to tamper with harmful objects. With a grown person, it magnifies the imagination and incites the senses.

In their search for the locus of the *Yezer Ha-ra*, the Sages did not distinguish between body and soul. They placed it in the heart, in the sense of man's inner self, as the repository of both the good and evil impulses. This, they expounded from the word *Lev* (heart) and *Levav* (also heart) in Deut. 6:5. The double use of the Hebrew letter *bet* (v) in *Levav*, they suggested, alluded to the two impulses, from which they derived the concept that God must be loved with both impulses!<sup>12</sup>

The evil impulse was essentially conceived in terms of sensuality, because it represented man's passion at its strongest. In the form of lust, it can momentarily master even the best of men. In one Talmudic illustration, R. Akiba's boast of being able to master his lust is shown to be empty talk; he is saved from sin thanks only to heavenly intercession.<sup>13</sup> Other passions, deriving from lust, are also attributed to the evil impulse's machinations, such as: greed, hatred, revenge, avarice and anger.<sup>14</sup> A conceited person is especially vulnerable, since he turns a blind eye to everything save his ego. Surprisingly, (or perhaps not so surprisingly!) scholars are also prone to be victimized. This is brought out in many statements such as: "One who is greater than his neighbor, his evil impulse is so much the greater" (*Kiddushin* 30b).<sup>15</sup>

As second nature, the evil impulse gains in intensity with age and intellectual maturity, though it introduces itself quite innocently. "At first, it is called traveller, then guest, then man [of the house] (*Kiddushin* 30b). R. Asi likens it to a thread which eventually hardens into a rope (*Succah* 52a). R. Abin describes it as sweet in the beginning but sour at the end (*T.J. Shabbat* 14c). It renews itself daily with an intensity equal to, if not greater than, previous days, and man cannot prevail

11. *The Fathers*, p. 85.

12. Frank C. Porter, "The Yezer Hara: A Study in the Jewish Doctrine of Sin," in Frank C. Porter, *Biblical and Semitic Studies* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902); and Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Schocken, 1961; reprint from 1909 edition), p. 59.

13. Porter, p. 50. A similar incident is told about R. Meir (*Kiddushin* 81a).

14. The Talmud recites the following incidents which resulted from momentary possession by the *Yezer Ha-ra*: "Rab Judah pulled the thrums [of his garments]; R. Aha b. Jacob broke vessels; R. Shesheth threw brine on his maidservant's head; R. Abba broke a lid" (*T.B. Shabbat* 105b).

15. In *T.B. Sukkah* 52a this is rendered: "The greater the man, the greater his Evil Inclination." When the *Yezer Ha-ra* sees a man dyeing his eyebrows, dressing his hair, lifting his heels — he says: "That is my man!" (*Gen. Rabbah* 22:6), cited in Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, p. 249.



against its drive without divine help.<sup>16</sup> The Sages caution: "He who spoils the evil impulse with tender and considerate treatment ends by becoming his slave" (*Gen. Rabbah* 22:6).

In their concern to impress their hearers with the seriousness of this demonic force, the Sages used strong figures of speech. In R. Abin's view, it is not less than a foreign God.<sup>17</sup> R. Levi terms it a "stone," of equal force to the tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were engraved.<sup>18</sup> The evil impulse is also a "mighty king" come to besiege a "little city" — the Torah.<sup>19</sup>

True to their monotheistic beliefs, the Sages imputed to God the creation of this malevolent impulse. On the word *vayyizer* ("and he created") in Gen. 2:7, R. Nahman b. Hisda expounded: "[It] is written with two *yuds* (yy), to show that God created two inclinations, one good and the other evil" (T.B. *Berakhot* 61a).<sup>20</sup> The evil impulse is thus perceived as a God-given, mysterious, and unpredictable passion which man must learn to master and tame; given its timeless presence, moreover, it cannot be ignored.

In their evaluation of the impulse's characteristics, the Sages were divided between those who viewed it as incorrigibly bad and others who ascribed to it remedial attributes. Many rabbis, not prepared to attribute any redeeming value to this impulse, portrayed God as regretting having created the evil impulse. Drawing support from Gen. 8:21, some inferred that God belatedly admitted to the completely evil nature of this element. In the words of R. Hiyya the Elder: "How wretched must be the dough, when the baker himself testifies it to be poor!" Expounding on a verse in Psalm 103:4, Abba Jose similarly bewails: "How poor must be the leaven when he who kneaded it testifies that it is hard!" (*Gen. Rabbah* 34:10). "Woe to the dough of which the baker himself testifies that it is bad. Wretched is the leaven which its maker calls bad," appears in another context.<sup>21</sup> From this, it follows that God regretted having created this malevolent impulse, and promised to remove it in the future.<sup>22</sup>

16. "R. Simeon B. Levi said: 'Man's Evil Desire gathers strength against him daily and seeks to slay him, . . . and were not the Holy One, blessed be He, to help him [man], he would not be able to prevail against him'" (*Kiddushin* 30b).

17. T.B. *Shabbat* 105b. Also, Porter, p. 53.

18. "R. Levi expounded: '... The Torah is called a stone and the Evil Inclination is called a stone . . . The stone shall watch the stone [i.e., the Torah watches over the *Yezer Ha-ra*]' (*Leviticus Rabbah* 35:5).

19. *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 9:15, #6 and #8.

20. George F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1927), p. 484.

21. Porter, p. 117.

22. In T.B. *Sukkah* 52a, the elimination of the Evil Inclination is foretold. Thereupon, both the righteous and wicked will weep. "The righteous will weep saying, 'How were we able to overcome such a towering hill!' The wicked also will weep saying, 'How is it that we were unable to conquer this hair thread!'"

It is I who put the leaven in the dough: but for the Evil impulse which I have created in him, [man] would have committed no wrong.<sup>23</sup>

The impossibility of mastering this element is considered an extenuating circumstance in favor of the sinner. "We cannot; the Tempter [evil impulse] rules over us" (T.B. *Sanhedrin* 105a), the Congregation of Israel laments.<sup>24</sup> One rabbi makes a bold attempt to exonerate Cain from his brother's death. Cain allegedly pleads:

Master of the world, if I have killed him [Abel], it is thou who hast created in me the Evil impulse ... Why didst thou permit me to kill him?<sup>25</sup>

This statement accords with the rabbinic viewpoint on Original Sin; it is not sin that is original but the impulse that causes it. That impulse is not the result of Adam's disobedience but antecedent to it and its cause.

As a means of countering the impulse, which can be countered, the Sages urged the study of Torah, prayer, and the practice of good deeds. Some professed the hope that it could even be completely subdued, and encouraged man to "incite the good impulse to fight against the evil impulse" (T.B. *Berakhot* 5a). Some claimed that Abraham and David were two out of a few exceptional persons who succeeded in mastering their impulse; other rabbis demurred.

Rather than stir up war against such a powerful antagonist, the majority of Sages counselled ways to circumvent it.<sup>26</sup> One method was to be so pre-occupied with the study and observance of the Torah as to make it virtually impossible for the evil impulse to be aroused. God says: "My children! I created the Evil desire, but [also] created the Torah as its antidote; if you occupy yourselves with the Torah, you will not be delivered into his hand" (T.B. *Kiddushin* 30b).<sup>27</sup> The Torah was a "stone" capable of countering and counterbalancing the equally onerous "stone" that was man's evil impulse. Prayer was an additional remedy against the ravages of this uncontrollable impulse.<sup>28</sup>

Generally, the Sages were confident that the demonic in man could

23. Schechter, p. 266.

24. Also in Porter, pp. 117-121.

25. Schechter, p. 281.

26. Schechter, p. 61. R. Levi b. Hama was among those who urged inciting the Good Inclination against the Evil one. But most rabbis followed R. Aha who preferred more defensive tactics, with the support of Torah, to offensive tactics. Faced with the *Yezer Ha-ra*, R. Aha advised: "Make your Tempter tremble with fear, and he will be unable to make you sin" (*Midrash Psalms* 4:9). See also Schechter, p. 272, for representative opposing views.

27. R. Ishmael suggests dragging "this repulsive wretch [the *Yezer Ha-ra*]" to the House of Study (T.B. *Sukkah* 52b). Others preferred milder metaphors: "As long as plaster (i.e. Torah) is on your wound, you may eat and drink what you please.... But if you take it away an evil ulcer will come forth" (T.B. *Baba Batra* 16a); in Porter, p. 128. Also, Moore, p. 67.

28. Schechter, pp. 273-5.

be tamed; if not through open contest, then indirectly through compliance with the stipulations of the Torah. As pointed out by the Talmudic interpreters, Strack and Billerbeck:

That the Israelite was capable of overcoming the Evil Inclination was the opinion of the overwhelming majority of ancient Jewish authorities. The opposing view is only rarely mentioned.<sup>29</sup>

From the foregoing, one may surmise that the evil inclination, regrettable as its presence may be, was to be warded off, not eliminated. But is its very presence also to be regretted? Is the *Yezer Ha-ra* necessarily evil? Hardly so. G.F. Moore, in his exhaustive study of rabbinic thought, remarks that in the rabbinic viewpoint the evil inclination was not intrinsically evil, but evil only from its effects when man allowed himself to be led by it to unlawful behavior.<sup>30</sup> Rabbinic literature has preserved clear allusions on the beneficent effects of this impulse — as a blessing in disguise, such as in the following rabbinic passage:

R. Nahman said in R. Samuel's name: "Behold, it was good," refers to the Good Desire; "And behold it was very good" [Gen. 1:31], to the Evil Desire. Can then the Evil Desire be very good? That would be extraordinary! But for the Evil Desire, however, no man would build a house, take a wife and beget children.<sup>31</sup>

Following this viewpoint, self-gratification, gain, and power are essential ingredients for the preservation of the human species. Not all agreed with this interpretation of the Biblical verse, but still others pressed this point further. The tractate *Yoma* recounts a half-serious, half-facetious story on the capture of the evil impulse by the Sages. Not wanting to do away with it, because "if you kill him, the world goes down," and not knowing what else to do, they incarcerated it for three days (sic). Then, they "searched the whole land of Israel for a fresh egg but could not find it." Whereupon they released it, not wanting the world to "go down." As a precaution against the power of this element, they weakened his sway before letting him go.<sup>32</sup> This farcical representation of the indispensability of the evil impulse — without which, chickens would not lay eggs (nor humans produce!) — adds further weight to the rabbinic belief that the so-called "evil" impulse was a necessary stimulant for beneficial causes ... similar to Goethe's devil — "A part of that power which always seeks to fashion evil and always effects the good" (1336).

The *Yezer Ha-ra*, an impulse on which life itself is predicated, can, by definition, not be intrinsically evil. On the contrary, one may deduce that the Sages urged a solicitous attitude toward this impulse in certain

29. Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, Vol. 4, Part 1 (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1928), p. 471.

30. Moore, p. 480.

31. *Genesis Rabbah* 9:7.

32. T.B. *Yoma* 69b.

circumstances, not its suppression, in the interest of life itself. Thus, this impulse has little in common with the principle or idea of evil found in many theologies. Uncontrolled sex, pride and anger are the price that we pay for activity and creativity.<sup>33</sup> In its manifestation as sensuality, the so-called "evil" impulse, in Jewish thought, is necessary for the propagation of the race. It turns evil only by improper use; with a moral focus, it can be a force for great good. This is confirmed by the startling rabbinic statement: "Three good qualities, the Holy One, blessed be He, created in this world, namely, the *Yezer Ha-ra*, Envy, and Mercy."<sup>34</sup> The first, intrinsically a morally neutral force, becomes evil through misappropriation by man. In *Tanhuma*, Genesis 7, God reproaches man for having done precisely so.<sup>35</sup>

The issue, following this alternate rabbinic opinion, is no longer how best to cope with the *Yezer Ha-ra* in order to silence it, but how best to galvanize the dynamic energy which it produces and sublimate it for good use — and they were optimistic that it could be done. (During the Holocaust, not a few non-Jews, such as the German, Oskar Schindler, were able to muster their *Yezer* for the performance of good deeds — the rescue of Jews from the hands of the Nazis.) The purpose, in the rabbinic view, was not so much the supplanting of the Evil Inclination, but learning how to manipulate it for good use, as in the following rabbinic saying:

He who knows — as did our father Abraham — how to transform the evil into the good inclination, and likewise, he who fights and refuses to surrender to his evil inclination — they both love the Lord.<sup>36</sup>

A give-and-take attitude is what is advocated — not an outright crusade. However, one must not provoke the *Yezer Ha-ra* with the intent of subduing it. David, believing himself to be shielded from it, was tested in the Bathsheba "affair" and found wanting.<sup>37</sup>

Not overcoming, but contention through integration, this was the paradoxical advice urged by these Sages. In the words of R. Simon b. Eleazar:

The evil impulse is like iron which one holds in a flame. So long as it is in the flame one can make of it any implement that one pleases. So, too, the evil impulse: its only remedy is in the words of the Torah, for they are like fire."<sup>38</sup>

Another passage enjoins man to love God "with both thine impulses, the good impulse and the evil impulse."<sup>39</sup>

33. Porter, p. 115.

34. *Aboth of R. Nathan*, 9a; as cited in Schechter, p. 267.

35. Schechter, pp. 268-9.

36. Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages*, I. Abrahams, tr. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), p. 475.

37. T.B. *Sanhedrin* 107a.

38. *Aboth of R. Nathan*, 16; p. 85 in *The Fathers*, note 10.

39. *Midrash Berakhot* 9:5; cited in Moore, p. 485.

Thus, the passions which this impulse arouses are the necessary stimuli for a pious life — ironic as this may sound. “If your Tempter comes to incite you to levity, gladden it with the words of the Torah,” counsels an anonymous rabbi.<sup>40</sup>

As alluded to earlier, the Sages considered the *Yezer Ha-ra* a “leaven,” without which the dough cannot rise and become bread.<sup>41</sup> It was the corresponding dual element in a universe in which all created things have their counterparts — their dual forms. This duality in creation is expressed in the Midrash as follows: “God created the world in pairs, the one in contrast to the other,” which, as interpreted by Solomon Schechter, referred to life and death, peace and strife, riches and poverty, wisdom and folly, the righteous and the wicked.<sup>42</sup> A parallel opinion is expressed in the Talmud:

For everything that God created He created [also] its counterpart . . . He created righteousness, and created wickedness; He created the Garden of Eden, and created Gehenna.<sup>43</sup>

Remove the Torah as a safeguard, and there is nothing to frustrate the triumph of the *Yezer Ha-ra*. To the Sages, the Torah represented the fount of one’s religious and ethical obligations. This model could also apply to other socio-religious configurations, with their own unique ethos — their particular “Torah” — for the fulfillment of a particular ethic.

Returning to Faust, one wonders in what way our discussion on the *Yezer Ha-ra* is helpful to an understanding of Faust’s *Streben*? We submit, only insofar as it illustrates the basic duality in the human constitution and the folly of attempting to undo it. This is an insight for which we should be grateful to the Sages.

While often stigmatizing the demonic in man as evil, the Sages treated it quite otherwise. They were perplexed by the presence of such intense passion in man, great or small, but could not bring themselves to condemn it outright. Their sense of the practical, coupled with a perceptive insight of day-to-day affairs, taught them to be modest in their evaluation of the *Yezer Ha-ra*. Thus the ambiguity. Theoretically condemned, it is, in practice, co-opted; censured, it is then assimilated. A part of God’s creation, it, too, came under the Torah’s purview.

Some modern thinkers have followed a parallel course. C.G. Jung proposed “individuation” as an integrating process, encompassing the rational and irrational elements in one’s behavior. The tragedy in Goe-

40. In the face of an uncontrollable passionate lust, R. Ilai advises the person to appease his passion, momentarily, though incognito, in a city other than the one where he resides. Needless to say, R. Ilai’s viewpoint is not shared by other scholars; it nevertheless signifies the practical approach of the rabbis vis-à-vis human passions (Porter, p. 127).

41. Also, Schechter, pp. 265-6.

42. Schechter, p. 265.

43. T.B. *Hagigah* 15a.

the's *Faust* stems from the hero's inability to comprehend this basic duality. Adopting an either/or attitude, either a life dominated by sensuality or a total repression of the passions ravaging the body ("You must renounce! Renounce all; that is the never-ending litany" — (1549-50), Faust succumbs to his passions, then suffers from the inability to control the explosive forces that he has let loose. Mephisto represents this maddening impulse — this indispensable handmaiden to creativity. "And since my keg is running dry, the earth is also in decline" (4094-5), he reminds Faust.<sup>44</sup> The disappearance of the daemonic in man could spell the end of man, his creative achievements, and — paradoxically — even his moral ones.

This contrast between opposing elements in man's nature is especially prominent in gifted persons. Faust is one such example. Not everyone, however, possesses the requisite ingenuity and stamina to coalesce these conflicting elements into a coherent whole, without, at the same time, prejudicing one's moral bearing. Most people, indeed, lack this esthetic quality. Religion, therefore, builds protective barriers, precluding such hazardous undertakings (Torah, being one such safeguard).

Faust fails precisely on this point. Aware of the contending forces struggling for mastery of his soul, he fails to discriminate between the different colors on his palette. Impressed by the prominence of the stark colors, he disregards the subtle nuances of the less distinctive ones. Allying himself with the *Yezer Ha-ra*, represented by, though not originating with, Mephisto, he wages warfare against the other half of his personality and sows misery around himself. His self-centered involvement with Margarete is one such example. Even Mephisto finds alliance with Faust quite embarrassing, if not distasteful.

This alliance (one cannot properly define it as a pact) with the devil is, rather, a wager of Faust with himself — never to be content, no matter how pleasurable the experience. Thus Faust to Mephisto:

If ever I should momentarily say: "Stay on, you are so beautiful!" Then you may cast me into chains. Then I gladly wish to be destroyed! (1699-1702)

It is an agreement to subvert one side of his personality to the other, with the implied hope that the resultant chaotic situation can somehow be managed, and Faust's personality salvaged.

Faust's *Streben* is actually purposeless. At the outset, he demands emotional and sensual gratification — not a superior knowledge, as is sometimes asserted by some interpreters. "I have for long found learning repugnant. Let hot passions quench my thirst in the throes of lechery" (1749-51). Faust longs to experience human life through-and-through. This craving has no direction, save its own momentary sat-

44. Heffner, p. 96, defines this as man "at war with his own tendencies to bog down."

isfaction. Bereft of moral or even practical goals, Faust's behavior suffers from inconsistency;<sup>45</sup> it eventually, lapses into boredom. From the outset, Faust is at the mercy of his daemon, not its master; this is the only "fullness" which he attains. "Frustration or success take turns as best as they may. However, eternal activity remains the state of man" (1757-9); he must encompass the heights and depths of human emotions; exhilaration and despair, happiness and misery — even at the risk of his sanity (1775).

Possessed of such limitless demands, Faust even transcends the devil. Mephisto seems helpless in the face of such extravagant entreaties, and he objects, reminding Faust that only a deity is capable of stilling such insatiable hunger (1780-3). Man's behavior remains circumscribed and restricted. Originally believing that he could safely toy with man's wild passions ("I'll drag him through the grossest life; through the wasteland of mediocrity. Let him struggle, stiffen and cling to slime" [1860-2]), upon second thought Mephisto alludes to his inability to contain man's uncontrollable passions: "And even if he weren't the devil's pawn, he still would go aground" (1866-7). Relentless, limitless, *Streben* irrevocably leads to man's ruin.

The solution, then, to the problem of *Streben* lies in a proper appreciation of the forces at play in human behavior. As previously observed, the Midrash, voicing a popular opinion, teaches that God created the world in pairs, and a well-known rabbinic passage urges man to love God with both impulses. Indicative of this viewpoint is R. Nahman's interpretation of the creation story, in which the Evil Inclination comprises part of God's "good" creation. Goethe's devil introduces himself in similar terms: "A part of that power which always seeks to fashion evil and always effects the good" (1336-7).

The Sages counseled adherence to the Torah as a medicine against the ravenous demands of the *Yezer Ha-ra*, a medicament to control, not to eliminate, the body's temperature; for "but for the Evil Desire, . . . no man would build a house." Goethe's devil also engenders movement, he "provokes . . . , and in the form of the devil leads to creativity" (343).

Creativity is correlated with fervor, zeal, torment and, yes, — even mania. And "the greater the man, the greater his *Yezer*."<sup>46</sup> Having conceded to this awareness, man should not escape the concurrent obligation of mastering his mutually inhospitable and mutually inconsistent (though paradoxically healthy) passions. The *Yezer Ha-ra* renews itself every day, the Talmud cautions. This human predicament, in the face of the *Yezer Ha-ra*, is formulated in R. Simon b. Pazzi's anguished cry:

45. Heffner, pp. 67 and 70.

46. T.B. *Sukkah* 52a.



"Woe to me before my Creator, and woe to me before my *Yezzer*."<sup>47</sup>  
There is no short cut out of this duality.

Faust comes to regret bitterly the surrender of his will to his evil impulse. Once enslaved to it, he can no longer shake it off (3243-4). In "Gloomy Day," Faust bewails his fate: "Oh, sorrow, sorrow! A human soul cannot conceive that one creature should have sunk to such bottomless wretchedness."

Spengler's "Faustian" man, characterized by a "boundless, willful and far-fetched striving soul," is equally bent on self-destruction.<sup>48</sup> Thomas Mann correctly perceived this, and considered such a course as counter to the progress of civilization. Dürer's rider, which came to symbolize the endless *Streben* of Faustian man, this "endlessly restless state" of a generation of Germans, ended in catastrophe. Rejecting reason in favor of base intuitions, a disoriented idealism degenerated into crass, boundless emotionalism and mass murder.

We are, apparently, fated to continue the search for a fuller self-realization of our humanity; the twin daemonic and spiritual-religious attributes in us guarantee this ongoing quest. The price, though, ought not to be our sanity. Hence, the need for a proper balance, of a middle path, in collaboration with these two extreme, warring elements.

---

47. T.B. *Eruvin* 18a, in Porter, p. 101.

48. Schwerte, p. 179.

# *A Political Metaphor in Biblical and Rabbinic Literature*

MARTIN SICKER

THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL thought, the very pervasiveness of governments in all societies in all times has led philosophers and theorists to speculate on the origins and necessity of such institutions. Was the need for government inherent in man's nature, or was it merely a device instituted by man to serve a specific purpose under a particular set of circumstances? Is society without government conceivable? Can men, through voluntary self-denial, so order their affairs as to permit them to live together in harmony without the need for an external regime to impose and maintain social tranquility? Or, in the absence of such an ordering regime, would society quickly become transformed into a veritable jungle dominated by the principle of "might makes right," its members perennially engaged in a desperate struggle for personal freedom and survival?

Within the traditional Judaic literature, a *locus classicus* for the exposition of rabbinic thought on these questions is the dictum of the sage, Rabbi Hanina, Deputy High Priest, who flourished at the time of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. In the Mishnah *Avot*, or *The Ethics of the Fathers*, he is cited as having taught: "Pray for the welfare [peace] of the government, for were it not for fear of the government, a man would swallow up his neighbor alive" (3:2). This statement merits close examination.

The notion of praying for the welfare of the government is, in itself, quite unexceptional, since there are earlier Biblical precedents for such an admonition. Thus, at the outset of the Babylonian Exile, we find Jeremiah urging the people of Israel to "seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace" (Jeremiah 29:7). Again, somewhat later, after the replacement of the Babylonians by the Persians as the dominant power in the region, and the subsequent permission given to the Jews by Cyrus the Great to return to their homeland, the people were once again entreated to "offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of Heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons" (Ezra 6:10). In both of these instances,

---

MARTIN SICKER has a Ph.D. in Political Science from the New School for Social Research, and has written extensively on political theory, geopolitics, and Middle East history.

the prayers for the "welfare of the government" are understandably related to the prospective benefits to be derived by the people of Israel from the stability of the regimes concerned: the Babylonians would permit the Jews to re-establish their community in exile, while the Persians were allowing them to re-establish their community in the Holy Land itself.

However, from the perspective of the historical context in which R. Hanina's statement was made, it is a rather remarkable, if not radical teaching. By contrast with the earlier situations, there was little benefit to be expected from the Roman conqueror. The country was devastated, and the Romans were engaged in attempting to suppress the last vestiges of Jewish communal autonomy. The Jews were routinely humiliated in their own land, where onerous burdens were placed on the community. During this period of turmoil and national disaster, it seems most unlikely that the sage was urging the people to pray for the welfare of the Roman government. It seems reasonable, therefore, to assert that R. Hanina's dictum must have been intended as a generic statement, and it is taken as such by the medieval commentator Rashi (1040-1104).<sup>1</sup> It is a universal teaching, reflecting the view that, absent the constraining power of a stable government, even an oppressive Roman regime, social chaos would soon ensue. Under conditions of anarchy, man's suppressed baser egocentric drives would rise to the surface and dominate his social behavior. In such circumstances, a man might, indeed, "swallow up his neighbor alive."

It is this latter metaphor, employed to convey the notion of a rampant egocentricity unrestrained by concern for social consequences, that is our particular concern in this article. It will be seen that the metaphor, explicitly as well as implicitly, has a history that long antedates its usage by R. Hanina, and that its employment provides a literary link connecting ancient and modern exponents of traditional Jewish thought on the fundamental questions of politics raised at the outset.

An explanation of R. Hanina's use of the metaphor is offered in the Talmud, which states: "As it is with the fishes of the sea, the one that is bigger swallows the other up, so with man; were it not for fear of the government, everyone that is greater than his fellow would swallow him up" (*Avodah Zarah* 4a). It is noteworthy that the phrase, "As it is with the fishes of the sea," not only elucidates the reference of the metaphor employed by R. Hanina, but is itself a complementary metaphor. It reflects the observation that one of the distinguishing characteristics of fish among the species of animate nature is the propensity to devour one another. Accordingly, the talmudic statement suggests that, to the extent that the predatory behavior of man under the con-

1. "Perush Rabbenu Shlomo Yizhaki al Massekhet Avot," *Perushei Rishonim leMassekhet Avot* (Jerusalem: Makhon Torah Shleimah, 1973), *ad loc.*

ditions of political anarchy is analogous to that of fish in the state of nature, the urgent need for the restraint on behavior characteristic of government is self-evident. The Talmud's metaphoric gloss on R. Hanina's dictum also provides the key for tracing the roots of the idea back to its ancient literary source.

At the end of the seventh century B.C.E., just prior to the destruction of the First Commonwealth, a period similar in a number of respects to that of R. Hanina, we find the prophet Habbakuk desperately searching for some meaning in the disaster about to engulf his people, as well as in the social chaos in the Kingdom of Judah that seemed to accompany the rise of the Chaldeans (Babylonians) as the dominant power in the region. He exclaims, accusingly: "Wherefore lookest Thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest Thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? And makest men as the fishes of the sea . . . that have no ruler over them" (Habbakuk 1:13-14). The prophet uses the metaphor, "as the fishes of the sea," to describe the observed state of anarchy, and sees such anarchy as the predicate of the prevailing conditions of social injustice where might becomes right. R. Hanina's dictum may be seen as a direct parallel to Habbakuk's cry of exasperation, from which text it evidently seems to derive. Yet, while this prophetic passage contains the earliest explicit Biblical use of this clearly political metaphor, one might suggest that its ultimate, but non-explicit, source may be traced back still further into antiquity, to the earliest narratives of Genesis, to the saga of Noah and the Deluge. Indeed, Habbakuk's employment of the metaphor may be seen as an explanation of one aspect of the Biblical story that seems otherwise inexplicable.

The Bible relates that

the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence . . . And God said unto Noah: The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth . . . And I, behold, I do bring the flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is in the earth shall perish (Genesis 6:11-13, 17; see also 6:19-20, 7:2-3, 8, 14, 21-22, and 8:17, 19, and *Kiddushin* 13a).

The "flood of waters" is to destroy all animate life on earth, preparing the earth for a new beginning by wiping clean the ecological slate. However, the method of destruction to be employed for the purpose has a peculiar aspect to it that commentators on the text have generally failed to note. By its very nature, the "flood of waters" will have little effect on aquatic life. The waters that will obliterate man's universe are the very means of existence for the fish of the sea. Consequently, only the "fishes of the sea" will continue to survive and thrive, unaffected by the divine intervention in the order of nature. Needless

to say, the Bible is not a textbook on morphology that is concerned to direct attention to the differences in the breathing apparatus of man and fish. It is concerned, however, with the moral development of man. The obviously deliberate exclusion of aquatic life from the destruction thus invites the attentive reader of the Biblical text to ponder the meaning and moral significance of the omission.

When one considers the Biblical passage from a moral perspective, this aspect of the narrative of the Deluge seems to take on a new dimension. Perhaps what is being suggested by the text is that, to the extent that man mirrors the social behavior of the fish, he merits subjection to the same environmental conditions as the fish, an environment in which he cannot survive. It is in the essentially amoral, instinctive nature of fish to devour weaker members of its own species, but it is not in the essentially moral nature of man to do so, even figuratively speaking. The emulation of such predatory behavior by men constitutes a denial of their humanity, thereby making men "as the fishes of the sea" and deserving of the fate to be wrought upon them by the flood of waters. The punishment to be imposed results from the corruption and violence of men living in a state of anarchy, without restraint. Like the fish of the sea, such men, as Habbakuk put it, "have no ruler over them."

Rather than breaking new ground, R. Hanina's teaching may now be seen as the articulation of a philosophic position regarding the nature of man and society, with roots deep in Biblical history and literature. As will be shown in the remainder of this essay, the consistency with which the political implications of this dictum and its associated metaphor have been adopted and explicated by rabbinic writers and teachers over the past millennium suggests that it may legitimately be considered as a mainstream position of Judaic political philosophy on the fundamental question of the purpose of government.

One of the most prolific and profound writers of the medieval period, Menahem Meiri (c.1249-c.1310) adopts the position that not only is government necessary to restrain man's propensity for violence in order to have a viable society, but that it is also critical to the very conduct of the religious life. Commenting on the dictum of R. Hanina, he argues:

The conduct of men is truly divided into two parts: religious conduct which is the province of the sages, and political conduct which is the province of the rulers and judges. Should there be an absence of religious leadership, there need not be a failure of political leadership because of it. However, where there is an absence of the political, then both will be found wanting. Because, where there is no fear of the government, each man fears that his neighbor will deceive and overwhelm him, and, in his terror, all of his time and effort will be spent in trying to preserve himself.<sup>2</sup>

2. *Sefer Bet haBehirah: Perush Massekhet Avot* (New York: S. Waxman, 1952), *ad loc.*

In making this argument, Meiri would apparently accord higher priority to the establishment of a stable political regime, a position consistent with that taken earlier by Maimonides (1135-1204). The great medieval philosopher argued that the Torah was concerned with "the well-being of the soul, and the well-being of the body." While he considered the former to be of greater ultimate importance, he insisted that "the well-being of the body, the government of the state, and the establishment of the best possible relations among men, is anterior in nature and time."<sup>3</sup>

Jacob ben Asher (c.1270-c.1343), one of the major codifiers of Jewish law, argues that the very preservation of human society is contingent upon the existence of a regime of law and its effective application in the affairs of man.

It is because of the judges who render judgments between man and his fellow that the world perseveres; except for the law, the rule of the stronger would prevail . . . as it is written: "Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for fear of the government, a man would swallow up his neighbor alive."<sup>4</sup>

This same line of argument is pursued by Nissim Gerondi (d.-c.1380), who also implicitly suggests that the legitimate authority of the regime may be derived from the consent of those subjected to it.

It is well known, (he writes), that the human species requires that a judge adjudicate their affairs; for if not, then man will swallow up his neighbor alive and the world will be destroyed. Every people has need of such a political society, so much so that the "wise one" [Aristotle] has said that even the band of thieves must have agreed to maintain honesty among themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Obadiah Sforno (1475-1550) insists that the dictum of R. Hanina applies even in the case of a regime of questionable legitimacy. He observes that, even though a corrupt ruler may extort his wealth from the populace by improper means, he will, nonetheless, be intolerant of such lawlessness among his subjects and will eliminate violence among the people.<sup>6</sup> Moses Almosnino (c.1515-1580) argues that R. Hanina urges prayer for the "peace" of the regime because it is only a regime that is stable that will serve as a deterrent to those who would oppress their fellow man; otherwise, "a man will swallow up his neighbor alive."<sup>7</sup>

Judah Loew ben Bezalel (c.1525-1609), the Maharal of Prague, approaching the issue from a rather different psychological perspective, appears to hold the view that man's tendency to anti-social behavior

3. *The Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Pardes Publishing, 1946), III:27.

4. *Tur-Hoshen Mishpat* (New York: Ozar Hasefarim, 1960), #1, p. 1b.

5. *Shnaim Assar Derushim* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1959), beginning of Lecture #11.

6. *Massekhet Avot im Perush Rabbenu Moshe ben Maimon veRabbenu Ovadiah Sforno* (Jerusalem: Rubin Maass, 1972), *ad. loc.*

7. *Pirkei Moshe* (Jerusalem: Makhon Torah Shleimah, 1970), *ad loc.*

is conditioned by an extreme egocentricity that has its origins in the natural order. In the absence of an external regime to impose constraints, that egocentric drive will precipitate a war of each man against every other. Thus, he writes:

It is because the nature of the world has decreed that man should be alone in the universe, therefore ... [that] each person insists, "the world was created for me," and that he alone properly belongs in the world. He is, therefore, prepared to swallow up his neighbor alive until he remains entirely alone.

Therefore, he continues, R. Hanina said, let us pray for the welfare of the government, "for if not for fear of the government that binds individual people until they constitute a society ... each individual would swallow up his neighbor alive."<sup>8</sup>

An interesting and, perhaps, contentious gloss on the traditionally low estimate of man's capacity for social harmony in the absence of a stable and effective political order, as evidenced by the preceding discussion, is that contributed by Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888). In his commentary on R. Hanina's teaching, he notes that man should be capable of sustaining an ordered society, free of sin and excess, on the basis of religiously informed reason alone.

But (he argues), human society is still in that state of moral imperfection where it fears even the lowliest visible human authority more than the unseen omnipotence of the King of Kings. Hence the orderly, undisturbed development toward that happiness to which all men are entitled is dependent upon the preservation of the authority of earthly powers and officials ... For if the government could not exercise its authority, the hand of everyone would be lifted up against all the others, and all of society would disintegrate.<sup>9</sup>

Implicit in Hirsch's commentary is the argument that there is no inherent need for government at all. Where government is required as a practical matter, its purpose is essentially restricted to the maintenance of public order. Finally, he apparently maintains that society is perfectible and, thereby, implicitly suggests that, under the proper conditions, the need for government might vanish and that, perhaps, the state could wither away. It is, however, beyond the scope of this paper to explore the ramifications of this somewhat utopian suggestion and its relation to the social and political thought of other nineteenth century writers such as Karl Marx.

The last writer whom I will consider here is Meir Leibush Malbim (1809-1879), who explicitly employed the metaphor of the fishes in his argument that the origins of political society and government are to be found in the primeval period, reflected in the Biblical story of Cain and Abel. Using the slaying of Abel and Cain's subsequent exile as his

8. *Derekh Hayyim* (Tel Aviv: Pardes Books, n.d.), on *Avot* 3:2.

9. *Chapters of the Fathers*, G. Hirschler, ed. (New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1967), *ad loc.*



point of departure, Malbim interprets the text, "and he [Cain] built a city" (Genesis 4:17), as follows:

After Cain became the first murderer, who destroyed the natural order of things, which resulted in man becoming as the fishes of the sea, each man swallowing his neighbor alive, he wanted to rectify this situation by building a city wherein men would join in a political society and establish laws and statutes among themselves in such a manner as to assist them in withstanding those who might rise against them . . . The erection of this city was the beginning of political society, and he founded the government of the city which is the basis of political science.<sup>10</sup>

As does Hirsch, Malbim clearly argues that, although man's social relations in the state of nature may be characterized by a harmonious anarchy, once the natural order had been violated government became absolutely necessary for the preservation of mankind. It is uncertain if Malbim would agree with Hirsch that, through the future perfection of man and society, it might be possible to restore the *status quo ante* of the Biblical state of nature.

This sampling of traditional rabbinic thought indicates that, notwithstanding divergences of concept and approach, there appears to be a broad convergence of opinion on the essential truth of the judgment regarding the need and purpose of government that is presented in the dictum of R. Hanina and its associated metaphors. That teaching, as this essay has attempted to demonstrate, reflects a philosophical position on the issue that clearly represents one of the longest and most consistently held ideas in the history of political thought.

---

10. *Hatorah veHaMizvah* (Jerusalem: Pardes, 1956), on Gen. 4:17.

# *A Religious Argument for Welcoming Converts*

LAWRENCE J. EPSTEIN

THERE ARE MANY ARGUMENTS FOR welcoming converts, often couched in the language of practicality. Some focus on conversion as a way to increase the Jewish population or as a defense against intermarriage. While such arguments are valuable, they are not the primary reason why converts should be welcome.

The primary reason to welcome converts is that Judaism calls upon those born Jewish to make Judaism available for all those seeking religious truth. Judaism is neither a national religion, nor one limited to only one people, but is a universal religion, and, therefore, in principle, available to, and religiously meaningful for, all. Judaism's revolutionary message was that it was a potentially universal religion because God was universal and God's message, first given to Jews but available to all, was universal.

Here is an abbreviated argument that might be used by those who believe the Jewish world view propels Jews to welcome converts.

*God is universal.*

This understanding of God's nature means: (a) God is the sole creator of the entire universe; and (b) God's rule and power extend over all. Such a view finds daily expression in all blessings that begin, "Blessed Art Thou, O Lord Our God, King of the Universe. . . ." God does not rule over just one people or one nation, or even several peoples or nations, but over all. God is, as Abraham noted, "the Judge of all the Earth" (Genesis 18:25).

The idea of God's universality does not mean, however, that God has provided revelation to all of the peoples of the world or that all of the nations of the world worship God. Furthermore, the notion of universality does not rule out the particularity of Godly actions. God's specific acts can be limited to a particular person, people, or nation. God's dominion, however, does imply that, in principle at least, God's spiritual rule can extend over all humanity. Indeed, much prophetic writing envisions such a spiritual rule.

---

LAWRENCE J. EPSTEIN is Professor of English at Suffolk Community College.

*Humanity shares a universal history.*

All people were created by God and descend from one couple. This fact provides not only a familial relationship for all peoples, but also includes the idea of a shared history and a shared destiny. It is human history, rather than the histories of individual people or nations, that is the focus of Godly concern. Because people share a common background and because they are all children of the same God, there exists the potential for them to unite on the basis of the acceptance of God's sovereignty and universal moral law. Because of God's concern for all humanity and the potential for a united humanity that worships God, the spiritual message that God provides is meant for all, not just one people.

*God chose to reveal the universal moral instruction, meant for all people, to a specific people, the Jews.*

God chose to reveal the Divine moral instruction meant for all, to the Jews. This choice was made to provide spiritual teachers for all humanity, not to restrict God's concern to one people only. It is precisely because of the possibility of conversion, because by personal choice any Gentile can choose to become a Jew, that the Jews cannot be seen as being exclusionary or as preventing others from entering the covenant that God made with the Jewish people. The choice of Jews as receivers of the message is the choice of a particular spiritual community, but a community open to all humanity and, thus, potentially a universal spiritual one.

Chosenness occurred because Jews were spiritually willing to accept responsibility and moral standards without receiving any special human privilege (Amos 3:2). This mutual agreement between God and the Jewish people formed the basis of their covenant.

The covenant, the agreement, is one of duty and obligation for the Jews, not of Divine rights given to them. Their election as the teachers of Divine instruction provides them with their religious vocation and their transcendent meaning.

*The Jews were given a religious vocation to make that universal moral instruction available to all who wished it.*

That instruction, while given to a specific people, was meant for all of humanity. It is possible to read the Torah as suggesting that, although God governs the world, God's name and Torah were revealed only to the people of Israel and, therefore, only Israel is obliged to worship God. By the time of the prophets, though, the correct interpretation of Jewish thought is clear: the message was meant not just for the Jews but for all.

The prophetic vision (Isaiah 2:2-4, Micah 4:1-4, Tobit 13:11) was of humanity accepting the moral instruction that came from Zion, and turning to God. This turning would usher in an era of peace. The second paragraph of the *Aleinu*, a central prayer, also foresees the day when all humanity will accept God's teachings. The moral laws were meant to be shared and not only kept by the Jews (T.B. *Shabbat* 88b and *Genesis Rabbah* 49,2).

Some prophets foresaw that it would be only at the end of the world that all people would worship God, and even then they would remain separate peoples. The early prophets saw such Gentile conversions as coming after an historical event in which God would be revealed. With some of the later prophets, especially Jeremiah and Habakkuk, the view had matured. Jeremiah believed that Israel was obliged to carry the Jewish message to the nations, to play an active part in bringing them to God, rather than waiting for any historical event. Both Jeremiah and Habakkuk believed that the idolatry of the Gentile nations was sinful. It is from such a view that a Divine commission to seek converts to Judaism can be seen.

The Jews were chosen to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). That is, they were not to keep the Divine instruction just for themselves. The duty of a priest is to bring to God all people who desire, of their own free will, to be brought. Hillel (*Pirke Avot* 1:12) called upon Jews to show love toward people precisely by drawing them close to the Torah. It is through the Jews that all other peoples are to be blessed (Genesis 12:3 and repeated four more times in Genesis: 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14). That is, Jews are to be "a light to the nations," offering to all people the knowledge of God and God's instructions. The religious vocation of Jews is to offer Judaism and to welcome those who seek and accept it.

In considering this Divine vocation, it is important to stress both the Jewish attitude toward those who do not accept the Divine instruction as well as the methodology of the instruction. While Judaism believes itself to be the truest religion, it does not see itself as the single and exclusive spiritual path to salvation. Righteous people with any belief system are accorded spiritual legitimacy by Judaism. Such a position is in contrast to the positions of Judaism's monotheistic children, Christianity and Islam, which disallow salvation outside of their individual faiths. Judaism sought a middle position, a universal religious view suitable for, and available to, all, but a religion that did not delegitimize individuals or peoples of other views. It is not possible to justify conversions to Judaism by coercion, force, bribery, or other similar methods. Instead, Judaism is to be made available and to be accepted or not accepted according to the free will of non-Jews. The methodology of instruction must be by education and not intimidation.

*The Jewish religious vocation is carried out by making Judaism available to all people and by welcoming converts.*

The message of religious vocation is stated in general terms, while conversion is a specific activity. It is important to examine the relationship between the two. Conversion ties the particularism of Judaism to the universalism of Judaism's message. Conversion provides a transcendent meaning to the mission's activities and a practical dynamic to perform that mission.

The transformation from a general, Divine commission to specific conversionary activity requires Judaism to hold some specific views. First, Judaism, in principle, must have a positive theological attitude toward converts; and second, Judaism must see welcoming converts as an acceptable means of transmitting its message. Despite some negative comments, in general, Judaism does have a positive theological attitude toward converts. The Bible is filled with references to non-Israelites, resident foreigners who lived in the Land of Israel. The Hebrew term for them, *gerim*, was used to describe those who had attached themselves, in one way or another, to Israel. The Torah has more than three dozen references to those foreigners, providing them equal rights, stressing their responsibilities to perform religious tasks as Jews did, and vigorously demanding that the *gerim* not be oppressed. The Talmud, using *gerim* to refer specifically to religious converts, makes some negative remarks, mostly attributable to historical circumstances, but, overwhelmingly, has favorable comments. (Some representative citations are: T.B. *Hagigah* 5a,8; T.B. *Pesahim* 87b, *Genesis Rabbah* 34,14, and T.B. *Yevamot* 47a,b).

It is not surprising that Jewish religious texts supported what Jews actually did — they gave Gentiles the opportunity to embrace Judaism. They stated the availability of conversion and welcomed those who did convert. The specific call to seek converts was clearly presented as the implication of election.

Abraham's journey from Haran to Canaan with "souls" whom he had gotten (Genesis 12:5) is understood by the Rabbis to mean the converts whom Abraham had made among men and Sarah among women. (The notion of "convert" and "conversion" is used only loosely here. Such a religious act did not occur until, at the earliest, the covenant at Sinai, when tradition states that all the Hebrews were formally "converted" to Judaism. Nevertheless, the religious activities by Abraham are comparable to, and may best be understood by, using the historically inaccurate term "conversion.") Indeed, the very fact that Abraham himself was not born Jewish, but was a convert — that is to say, a Jew by *belief* not *birth* — is significant. Abraham's existence proves that a person who is not born Jewish can be significant, even decisive, in Jewish history. The fact of Abraham's conversion means that, ultimately, all

Jews are descended from a convert and, therefore, should be willing to welcome other converts. Abraham's first actions of converting his wife and son may be seen as an ethical imperative for all Jews to seek converts; Abraham was, in fact, seen by the Rabbis (*Genesis Rabbah* 39,21) as a missionary. He did, after all, enter the land attempting to alter pagan beliefs to a belief in one God. While it is true that tradition describes Abraham's conversionary effort to be a failure, the creation of a Jewish people was seen as a necessary step and not as a substitute for extending God's Torah to the world. Additionally, Abraham waited until he was ninety-nine to be circumcised, so that no later male candidate for entry into the covenant could regard himself as too old.

Ruth is probably the most famous convert in the Bible. Like Abraham, she is decisive in Jewish history, for traditionalists believe that she is the ancestor of the Messiah. Ruth's moving story of loyalty is sometimes inaccurately presented as a reaction to the anti-conversionary views of Ezra and Nehemiah, who worked to prohibit intermarriage. In fact, however, their efforts (parallel in many ways to efforts in our own times to curb intermarriage) were not directed against converts, but against those who had intermarried and not converted. Ruth shows that converts are welcome and are allowed to join the community.

Prophetic visions of the universal rule of God and of instruction coming forth from Zion also indicate that conversion is the central activity needed to reach the ideal state. This conversionary mission is exemplified by the story of Jonah, who is told that God's concern and salvific power extend to all people. Indeed, the entire book rests on the hope of return to God's commands if not to formal conversion. It is Jonah's physical voyage that allows for a reading of mission. Jeremiah also went to other people than just Jews with his message. He was appointed a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5). Passages in Isaiah underscore that such efforts were not limited to a few prophets, but were meant as a mandate for the entire Jewish people.

However difficult their conversionary efforts would be — and the reception given by history to Jews underscores the extent of that difficulty — Jews were appointed by their covenant, in the words of Isaiah (42:6-7), to open eyes deprived of light and to rescue (spiritual) prisoners from confinement. The clear notion that people will, by free choice, convert to Judaism is found in Isaiah 56:6-8 and elsewhere (for example, Jeremiah 3:17; Zechariah 14:9; and Psalms 86:9). In the Talmud, Rabbi Jose ben Halafta (T.B. *Avodah Zarah* 3b) and Rabbi Simeon ben Elazar (T.B. *Berakhot* 57b) note that in messianic times converts will acknowledge the Lord. Rabbi Ammi (T.B. *Avodah Zarah* 24a,b) makes it clear that converts will be gladly received.

Having enunciated the nature and the means of achieving their Divine vocation, the Jews were urged in many psalms to carry out that vocation, to teach about God to the world so that the world would ac-

knowledge God's sovereignty. Some examples from Psalms include 9:12; 18:50; 22:26f; 67; 72:11; and 6:3,10.

The most famous of the Talmudic passages specifically praising conversionary work is by Rabbi Johanan (and agreed with by Rabbi Eleazar ben Pedat) in T.B. *Pesahim* 87b, a passage in which it is asserted that God exiled Jews from their homeland for only one reason, to increase the number of converts..

There have been significant challenges to seeing the Jewish mission as specifically conversionary in intent. Indeed, it is often claimed by some particularist Jews that the mission was to bring humanity close to God, but that conversion to Judaism was neither required nor desirable. The moral basis for such a claim rests on a valid observation about Judaism's message. It is that Judaism's message and Divine mission do not mean that Gentiles are belittled or formally required to become Jewish to achieve salvation or to be considered righteous. From some traditionalists' point of view, it is sufficient for Gentiles to follow the moral code given to Noah in order to lead a moral life. The Jewish mission, then, on this reading, might be fulfilled by trying to get non-Jews to adhere to the seven Noahide Laws, which mandated that all people refrain from idolatry, incest and adultery, bloodshed, profaning God's name, injustice (by the affirmative act of establishing courts of law), robbery, and such cruel acts as removing a limb from a living animal.

There are serious deficiencies in such a point of view.

First, in principle, all movements within Judaism accept righteous converts. The fact that, in theory, any Gentile could become a Jew means that the Noahide laws, while acceptable for an ethical world, are not the spiritual heights which can be scaled by religious seekers. Indeed, the Noahide laws were offered to Gentiles who were not ready to become Jews. Thus, a hierarchy was established, with paganism at the bottom, followers of Noachism second, and followers of Judaism at the top. Precisely because conversion is available to all, it may even be seen as unethical for Jews not to make their religion available to Gentiles in place of the Noahide laws. Reluctance to make Judaism available may violate the Divine mandate to love the Lord with all one's heart, soul, and might; if Judaism is not offered, after all, that is hardly loving it fully.

Gentiles who follow the Noahide laws are certainly admired. In ancient times, someone who accepted the seven laws was known as a *Ger Toshav*, or semi-convert. The possibility of living according to the Noahide commandments is illustrated in modern times by Aimé Pallière, who, in his autobiography, *The Unknown Sanctuary*, recounts his close attachment to Jewish life without a formal conversion. Nevertheless, the number of such self-styled followers of Noachism is extremely small, and small numbers do not provide an adequate support group for those



who wish to draw near to Judaism. In addition, a Noahide designation creates a new theological category in America, unfortunately analogous in some ways to a formally unconverted Jew who also accepts a non-Jewish religious viewpoint.

Additionally, although the Noahide laws seem, at first glance, to be non-controversial and acceptable, say, to many Christians, in fact the seeming congeniality is deceptive. For example, according to Maimonides (but not the Tosafists or Joseph Caro), the prohibition against blasphemy precludes a belief in the Christian messiah, hardly an acceptable position for most Christians.

Finally, even with the Jewishly minimal nature of the Noahide laws, Jews have only rarely attempted to teach the world about them; Jews have historically muted even this very limited mission, rendering the Noahide laws irrelevant to non-Jews.

Should Jews, then, re-undertake their Divine mission by seeking converts or Noahides? Is it sufficient to convert the world to morality rather than, specifically, to Judaism?

The answer, of course, is that it may be desirable to convert the world to morality and not Judaism, but it is certainly not ideal. The missionary questions are: how can Jews help make righteous people out of the non-righteous, more righteous people out of the minimally righteous, and the most righteous possible out of the more righteous? To make the world as righteous as it can be is to make it as Jewish as possible, for Jewish adherence to Judaism implies that Jews believe that their religion expresses the most central and complete religious truths and the most thorough and accurate moral guidelines, and that other faiths are only partially true and morally complete. Not to argue for as Jewish a world as can be, at least in theory, is to accept a world that is not as righteous as it might be. Thus, making Judaism available is important. Formal conversion to Judaism is the ideal, but not the requirement. It should be offered but not forced. It should be available but not mandated.

The Jewish mission, unfulfilled because of historical circumstances, remains. If the Noahide laws were inadequate to exemplify the mission, there still needs to be a justification for seeing conversion as the dynamic of that mission.

The goal of the mission is clear: the spiritual transformation of humans to reconcile humanity and God, a transformation that will lead humans to adhere to the ethical monotheism of Judaism. It is a reconciliation that will alter the relationship from the current one of Godly disappointment with the moral behavior of humanity to the belief that the promise of human moral potential has been fulfilled, thereby justifying the original creation of humans and simultaneously providing the ultimate meaning to the human enterprise.

Education, not coercion, is the method for reaching such a goal. It is reached by teaching those who seek to learn about Judaism.

One way of teaching is passive — that is, to be a moral model. Jews, in religious isolation, with a fence around the Torah, observing the commandments, have been witnesses to Judaism. They have faithfully practiced Judaism as best they could so as to present themselves as ethical models for the world to emulate. This model, however, has been a failure. The historical legacy of the non-Jewish confrontation with Jewry makes it unlikely that even a perfect Jewish people will be regarded as a pattern to follow. The world has not emulated the Jews, but has, instead, seen Jewish witnesses as small in number, weak in political power, and unorganized for communal self-defense; in short, as perfect victims. Waiting does not serve to prepare a people for history's tragedies, much less to prevent them.

The failure of this model needs to be examined to consider its weaknesses.

Pre-messianic human efforts toward redemption imply activity rather than simply hoping that others will follow one's moral example (particularly when accompanied by powerlessness), or simply waiting for the messiah. (Indeed, the morality of powerlessness may be relatively easy, and an inadequate statement of the complete religious ideal of Judaism.) Seeking self-perfection is a significant activity, but seeking only one's own moral perfection while waiting for others to act on their own with no effort to help them is an inadequate effort. If the efforts to help are uncoercive, failure to help may even be considered immoral. It may even violate the Biblical injunction against allowing a "blind" person to fall into a trap. Passive witnessing is an implicit argument for a retreat from history and for moral quiescence; it is an abandonment of the Jewish covenantal obligation. Of course, such an abandonment was prudent for Jews for much of their history because of actual and potential persecution for expressing their views. What this means is that when prudential considerations become vital, such as when survival is at stake, it is reasonable to delay transmitting the Jewish message; but when historical conditions allow for such a transmission, delay is no longer morally tenable.

Jews may surely wait, hope, and pray for the coming of the messiah, but such passivity makes for an insufficient Jewish present. It is just such a religious attitude that for so long opposed, and, in some circles, continues to oppose, the Zionist enterprise. Waiting for messianic redemption is an unwarranted self-curtailment of the Divine mission. Waiting ignores the necessary tasks to be completed now, so that a messianic redemption could complete, rather than replace, human efforts.

It is also possible to question the need for conversion if Judaism's core is seen not as its religious commandments and ethical insights as written in its sacred texts, but, rather, solely in its prophetic vision of

justice. In such a secular view, Judaism does not need to be available to all. Rather, Judaism needs to discard its peculiar traits and emphasize those elements that are universally applicable. Of course, such a modernist, universal “mission” misses the very point of the covenantal mission — that it is Judaism’s distinctive theology, ethics, and general way of life, that are most potentially redemptive.

Conversion, then, is a legitimate dynamic of the Jewish mission. However, the realities of history must also be taken into account. It must be the case that conversionary activity is legitimately rooted in the Jewish past and that this is a prudential moment for Jews once again to welcome converts.

*The revival of the nation of Israel, among other factors in Jewish life, makes this the right moment to resume the conversionary vocation.*

It is possible, mistakenly, to consider the re-establishment of Israel as inimical to the Jewish mission, as focusing on concentrating Jews in a limited physical space with nationalistic aspirations, rather than having Jews throughout the world as potential teachers with religious aspirations.

In fact, though, Jewish nationalism is important for the Jewish religious vocation. In many of the most crucial prophetic passages, such as Isaiah 2:2, the nations come to Zion to worship God. That is, the universal mission seems to be possible only when Jerusalem — Zion — is under Jewish sovereignty. The revival of Israel makes such a prophecy presently feasible.

Zionist theories of minority persecution are useful in analyzing why the revival of the Jewish state is helpful to the revival of the Jewish mission. A powerless minority is not an attractive group to join. In contrast, a minority with the startling historical success of re-establishing a homeland (which the religiously sensitive could easily interpret as Godly intervention on behalf of Jews) is very much more attractive. In this sense, the necessary psychological preconditions to allow for re-establishing the universal mission could have come about only after the establishment of Israel.

Restored to their ancient glory, seen by the world as miraculously saved, having the self-defense that allows both an orderly transmission of heritage and the loss of fear of physical consequences in asserting the value of that heritage, the Jews after Israel can return to their historic concern for redemption. They are poised to organize to offer Judaism to the world.

In addition to the revival of Israel, other factors in Jewish life make this the right moment to resume the religious vocation to offer Judaism. Most Jews live in Western countries which are free from persecution. In places like the United States, Jews can join others to make available

their religious views. Such a tolerant environment, rare in Jewish history, combines with Israel to make this a crucial historical opportunity to reintroduce into Jewish history the missionary elements of the covenant. Such an opportunity will challenge the Jewish people do provide a model that Gentiles will respect, but that in no way weakens the imperative to seize the opportunity and meet that challenge, through emphasizing Jewish unity and the myriad inspiring and attractive (not necessarily easy) facets of Jewish life and thought.

That such a conversionary endeavor would be a re-introduction of a neglected facet of Jewish history, rather than an historical novelty, can be seen by looking at Jewish history. Indeed, the theological reasons for welcoming converts would be undermined if it were not for the validating intensity and scope of Jewish conversionary activity in its early history, the forced retreat from that activity, and the beginnings of its return.

We live in historical times, and we need to respond to their call.

# *The String that Leads the Kite: Steven S. Schwarzschild's (1924 — 1989) View of Jewish Philosophy*

JOSÉ R. MAIA NETO

IN MID-FALL, 1989, I DECIDED TO WRITE A paper in which I examined Guttman's famous thesis that it is more accurate to talk of "philosophy of Judaism" than of "Jewish philosophy" given that, in the strict sense of the expression, there is no Jewish philosophy, that is, a philosophy which is peculiarly Jewish as opposed, for instance, to Greek philosophy.

My first move was to discuss the topic with Professor Steven S. Schwarzschild. He gave me references to recent work done on the issue by scholars who have proposed criteria for Jewish philosophy in the face of Guttman's challenge. He also suggested that I take into consideration his own alternative which, as he then told me, differs from Guttman's in that he thinks that there is a Jewish philosophy, but for reasons different from those argued by other scholars. Although he had never explicitly and fully addressed the issue, Professor Schwarzschild indicated a couple of articles of his in which his alternative was either implied or where related questions were addressed. During our conversations he also summarized, briefly, his position.

Before I could start working on the paper, Professor Schwarzschild suddenly died. I then decided to restrict the focus of my paper to his alternative. Both because Professor Schwarzschild's view is interesting and bold, and because the circumstance of having become familiar with it and with his work on Yehudah Halevi is the result of some of his last intellectual efforts, I feel obliged to present his position on Jewish philosophy. It is with sadness and humility that I pay him this memorial.

## I

The point most raised, in the discussions of whether there is a Jewish philosophy, is the historical fact that the bulk of what is called Jewish philosophy, both medieval and modern, "was never a purely and immanently Jewish creation; it never welled up spontaneously from

---

JOSÉ R. MAIA NETO is a Brazilian scholar who is presently concluding his doctoral studies at Washington University, St. Louis, MO.

the inmost fountains of Jewish life. It always drew on alien influences.”<sup>1</sup> The skepticism about the existence of a Jewish philosophy, in the sense of a peculiar Jewish way of philosophizing, arises from the historical fact that Judaism was not the intellectual framework of inquiry which generated Jewish philosophy, but “something given, a datum” which “Jewish philosophers throughout the generations . . . ‘elucidate and justify’”<sup>2</sup> by employing analytical tools borrowed from secular philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle in the Middle Ages, and Kant and Hegel in the modern period.

Besides this historical point, there is also a conceptual difficulty often raised by commentators. Because philosophy is a universal, rational inquiry into the truth, a *Jewish* philosophy seems as meaningless as Jewish physics or mathematics. As Zev Levy puts it,

[h]ow can a certain concept be truly philosophical, and simultaneously Jewish in its essence? How can one make compatible the objectivity and universality that are of the very nature of philosophy with content that is national and particularistic?<sup>3</sup>

Because of these difficulties, another scholar, Leon Roth, is quite careful, even in referring to “philosophy of Judaism,” not to mention “Jewish philosophy”. Because Judaism is not that which explains but what is explained by philosophy, the term “of” (in “philosophy of Judaism”) shall be taken, he says,

after the model of the “philosophy of science” . . . [instead] of that of the “philosophy of Kant.” The philosophy of Kant is the philosophy *held* by Kant. The philosophy of science is the philosophical inquiry *into* science. Science is not the inventor but the object of the philosophy. Philosophy . . . is the thinking and rethinking of fundamentals, and when an object is attached to it, the sphere of its application is restricted. . . . The “philosophy of Judaism” is the thinking and rethinking of the fundamentals of Judaism.<sup>4</sup>

This position has been the object of recent criticism. Raphael Jospe calls views such as Roth’s and Guttman’s “essentialist” perspectives, and criticizes them on the grounds that one cannot satisfactorily specify the fundamentals of Judaism, which is necessary in order to define what is to be counted as Jewish philosophy. Furthermore, it is argued that Jewish philosophers vary greatly, so that, as Levy puts it,

there is no definition whatsoever of Jewish philosophy that holds for all Jewish thinkers, or that can serve as a general criterion for belonging to the world of Jewish philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

1. R.J. Zwi Werblowski, introduction to Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1964), p. x.

2. *Ibid.*, p. xi.

3. Zev Levy, *Between Yafeth and Shem: On the Relationship Between Jewish and General Philosophy* (New York: P. Lang, 1987), p. 101.

4. Leon Roth, “Is There a Jewish Philosophy?” in Raymond Goldwater (ed.), *Jewish Philosophy and Philosophers* (London: Hillel Foundation, 1962), p. 11.

5. Levy, *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

Yet, both Jospe and Levy claim that a legitimate general criterion for defining philosophical works, as belonging to what may be meaningfully called Jewish philosophy, is whether the work in question “gives expression to creativity in the area of the religious and national culture of Judaism throughout the generations.”<sup>6</sup> The solution to Guttman’s challenge is, therefore, to characterize Jewish philosophy as a cultural, intellectual expression of the Jewish nation instead of as a school of philosophy with a peculiar standpoint with respect to universal philosophical problems. Instead of an essentialist criterion, a formalist one is proposed, namely, the belonging to the Jewish nation with focus on Jewish issues such as the election of Israel and the commandments.

The positions must be Jewish (whether true or false) not because of what they are intrinsically, but because of their being held by Jews . . . When it comes to truth . . . we must consider only the statement, and not the speaker (whether Jewish or non-Jewish). But when it comes to determining Jewishness, we must consider the speaker and not what is said.<sup>7</sup>

Jospe claims, however, that being a Jew is not a sufficient condition for being a Jewish philosopher. It is also necessary that Jewish issues or issues relevant to Judaism be addressed. He then defines Jewish philosophy as follows:

[I]t is the Jewish context which determines what is uniquely Jewish about Jewish philosophy — a context of encounter between philosophy and Judaism, dealing with Jewish and philosophic sources, which together formed the existing Jewish Tradition.<sup>8</sup>

Common both to the position which asserts, and to that which denies, that there is a Jewish philosophy, are the assumptions, first, that Judaism and philosophy form an historical and conceptual duality, and, second, that the bulk of Jewish philosophy or of the philosophy of Judaism is the result of making Judaism the object of philosophical analysis. This relation of Judaism and philosophy raises the question, as Professor Schwarzschild nicely puts it, “whether . . . Jewish philosophy is only an accommodation to non-Jewish philosophical truth — a tail, so to speak, on the kite of secular philosophy.”<sup>9</sup>

The subordinated position of Judaism vis-à-vis secular philosophy in Jewish philosophy has generated reactions against Jewish philosophy and against philosophy in general. Those reactions often aim at safeguarding the religious uniqueness of Jewish thought. This was the case

6. Ibid., p. 127.

7. Raphael Jospe, “Jewish Particularity from Ha-Levi to Kaplan: Implications for Defining Jewish Philosophy,” in Raphael Jospe and Samuel Z. Fishman, (eds.), *Go and Study: Essays in Honor of Alfred Jospe* (Washington: Hillel Foundation, 1980), p. 321.

8. Raphael Jospe, *What is Jewish Philosophy?* (Jerusalem: The Open University of Israel, 1988), p. 75.

9. Steven S. Schwarzschild, “Modern Jewish Philosophy” in Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr, (eds.), *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought* (New York: Scribner, 1987), p. 633.



during the Middle Ages against Maimonides, and reappears in different forms and degrees of intensity among some modern Jewish philosophers and scholars. The extremist case is that of Lev Shestov, who sees Philo of Alexandria as the first “traitor” of the Biblical tradition. The process started by him, as Werblowsky puts it, of “justifying” revelation to Greek reason, is seen as a process of corrupting the trans-non-rational truth of revelation, the beginning of Jerusalem’s surrender to Athens that occurs throughout the Middle Ages in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian medieval philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

A similar attitude, although more mitigated, lies behind manifestations of praise to Yehudah Halevi, the most pre-eminent medieval Jewish critic of Greek philosophy, such as that he “was more of a Jewish philosopher than . . . Maimonides.”<sup>11</sup> The rejection of Jewish rational philosophy as an authentic expression of Judaism also motivates Gershom Scholem’s historiography of Jewish mysticism. The Kabbalist tradition, he argues, “is more deeply and in a more vital sense [than Jewish philosophy] connected with the main forces active in Judaism.”<sup>12</sup>

[T]he Kabbalah certainly did not *arise* as a reaction against philosophical “enlightenment,” but once it was there it is true that its function was that of an opposition to it. . . . In my opinion, there is a direct connection between Yehudah Halevi, the most Jewish of the Jewish philosophers, and the Kabbalists. For the legitimate trustees of his spiritual heritage have been the mystics, and not the succeeding generations of Jewish philosophers.<sup>13</sup>

In what follows, I show how Schwarzschild disagrees with all of the aforementioned positions. Contrary to Guttman, he thinks that there is a Jewish philosophy, whose fundamental thesis is the supremacy of ethics over metaphysics. Unlike Levy and Jospe, he holds an “essentialist,” “transhistorical” criterion, and refuses to limit Jewish philosophy to the Jewish nation. Contrary to Levy, Jewish content is *not* particularistic, and contrary to Jospe, truth is to be considered in defining Jewish philosophy. If one prefers the expression “philosophy of Judaism,” contrary to Roth, Schwarzschild would say that both senses of “of,” as in “philosophy of science” and in “philosophy of Kant,” obtain in “philosophy of Judaism. Finally, he attempts to refute the traditional interpretation of Halevi and of the mystics, by claiming their compatibility with rational Jewish philosophy.

10. Lev Shestov, *Athens and Jerusalem*, tr. by Bernard Martin (New York: Clarion, 1966), part III.

11. Levy, *Op. cit.*, p. 128.

12. Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941), p. 23.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

## II

The main difference between Schwarzschild and most scholars on the issue of whether there is a Jewish philosophy is that, unlike most scholars, he denies that there is a sharp, fundamental distinction between Judaism and philosophy. This position facilitates his positive answer to the question, and his claim that Jewish philosophy has universal validity. In the passage quoted below, he indicates his disagreement with two major views of Jewish intellectual history.

The truth of my present analysis of the nature of Jewish intellectual history [he refers to his claim of the analogy between Jewish mysticism and rationalism] refutes two other schemata of Jewish intellectual historiography — that of G. Scholem, in which philosophy and mysticism are, by and large, pitted against one another as mutually hostile forces, and that of Isaiah Leibovitz, in which philosophy and rationalism are eliminated as religious forces altogether.<sup>14</sup>

The mistake common to both schemata is, according to Schwarzschild, to take Judaism and philosophy as two fundamentally different phenomena, connected with different forces (the one, religious, the other, rational/intellectual). He disagrees with the thesis held by Levy and Jospe (and also, to some extent, by Guttmann) that the historical context of the encounter between the Eastern tradition of Judaism and the Western tradition of philosophy characterizes Jewish philosophy. Although he does not deny this context of the encounter, he holds that the historic birth and unfolding of Jewish philosophy does not entail that its validity be confined to Jewish culture:

The view held here, on the other hand, is that philosophy is Jewish by virtue of a transhistorical primacy of ethics; non-Jewish thought will, of course, sometimes also arrive at such an ethical primacy by rational means to one degree or another, and Jewish philosophy, like Judaism at large, will then gratefully use or bend to its purpose its non-Jewish infusions.<sup>15</sup>

By claiming a transhistorical criterion, Schwarzschild fulfills the universalist requirement for claiming a genuine Jewish *philosophy*, and is therefore prepared to acknowledge that its essence is not accessible only to Jews. What makes it, then, a *Jewish* philosophy?

In the first place, one should not be misled by Schwarzschild's claim that non-Jewish thought arrives at the primacy of ethics by rational means, as if Jewish thought could arrive at it by non-rational ones. Schwarzschild is a strict rationalist who strongly believes that Judaism (rabbinical tradition as well as Jewish philosophy) is, essentially, a critical/rational analysis of religious/philosophical texts. So, again, if revelation is not relied on as the basis of Jewish thought, and given that Jewish

14. Steven S. Schwarzschild, "An Introduction to the Thought of R. Isaac Hutner," in *Modern Judaism*, Fall 1985: 276.

15. Schwarzschild, "Modern Jewish Philosophy," p. 629.

and non-Jewish thinkers both employ rational means of inquiry, why is a philosophy that claims the primacy of ethics peculiarly Jewish?

When Schwarzschild notes that the infusions of secular philosophy were so pervasive that one could ask whether Jewish philosophy is only a tail on the kite of secular philosophy, he answers as follows:

[I]n itself this would, even if true, not necessarily be an objection . . . [P]hilosophically . . . , if reason be truth, and Judaism true, then all rational beings must be capable of the Jewish truth. Still, historically it should always be noted that in modern as in classical Jewish philosophy, the dualism of God and creation, freedom and nature, always tends to assert itself in Jewish philosophy, in contrast to the Greek assertion of the primacy of metaphysics [i.e., truth] over ethics. . . . [E]ven the Jewish Hegelians . . . proclaimed Kant's primacy of practical reason . . . The claim may thus be made that Jewish philosophy is not finally the tail on the kite but the string that leads it.<sup>16</sup>

Note first that Schwarzschild's position differs from the formalism of Jospe and Levy, who hold that Jewish philosophy cannot be characterized strictly philosophically, i.e., in terms of the truth value of its statements. Schwarzschild holds that true philosophy is Kantian or Platonic — practical reason or the idea of good has primacy over theoretical reason or the idea of truth. This position is universal, accessible to the pagan Plato and to the Lutheran Kant. "Self-conscious" Jewish thinkers arrive more often at this position because they are thinking about a tradition (they belong to a tradition) whose essence is the claim of such primacy (God is not primarily a metaphysical entity but a supreme volition, issuing ethical commands). The image of the string leading the kite now begins to become clearer.

When Kant and Cohen then speak of the "primacy of practical/ethical reason" they are only putting in modern philosophical language what Judaism has classically proclaimed as the ultimacy of the God of morality.<sup>17</sup>

So, ultimately, the philosophy that asserts the primacy of ethics is *Jewish* not because it is held by a Jew or because it is generated in a certain context of the Jewish nation, but because it asserts a position which was originally asserted by Judaism, and which is essentially consistent with it.

In personal conversation, Schwarzschild told me that his position is a development of Cohen's view. Although Cohen does not say so explicitly, Schwarzschild thinks that implicit in his work is the thesis that Western culture approaches truth in the proportion that it appropriates the truth of Judaism. All philosophy — pagan, Christian, etc. — judaizes itself to the extent that it is true. So, as to the question whether there is a Jewish philosophy, Schwarzschild told me that his

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 633-34.

17. Steven S. Schwarzschild, "Conscience," in Cohen and Mendes-Flohr, (eds.), *Op. cit.*, p. 89.

position is that there is no other valid philosophy at all except Jewish philosophy, which he understands as Judaism as best understood by Jewish philosophers (more on that below).

### III

Raphael Jospe raises a few objection to essentialist characterizations of Jewish philosophy. The first is that the essence is usually not indicated, and, when it is, it tends to dogmatize Jewish philosophy. The first part of the objection certainly does not apply to Schwarzschild, who claims that the essence of Jewish philosophy is the assertion of the supremacy of ethics. Second, Schwarzschild does not assert the primacy of ethics as a dogma in the sense, feared by Jospe, that philosophical inquiry is restricted to the limits fixed by the proposed essence. On the contrary, Schwarzschild's view of Jewish philosophy is strictly philosophical: a strict rational inquiry not in the least restricted either by theological dogma on the one hand, or by Jewish context or nation on the other.

Another objection raised by Jospe is that the assumption of an essence of Jewish philosophy creates artificial differences between Jewish and non-Jewish aspects in a single doctrine, leading, therefore, to the paradox that the same thinker may be both a Jewish and a non-Jewish philosopher. Jospe notes that, according to this view, Maimonides' proofs of the existence of God, for instance, would be Jewish but the Aristotelian principles which he uses in the proofs would be non-Jewish. Jospe wonders, therefore, how a Jewish cake can be made of non-Jewish ingredients.<sup>18</sup> Finally, Jospe adds that there is no uniform Jewish tradition which could be accounted for by the assertion of some essence.<sup>19</sup>

Schwarzschild would dispute the claim that there is no uniform Jewish tradition. That there are differences among Jewish philosophers is undeniable. But, beyond those differences, on a more general and fundamental level, there is a tendency, he would argue, to assert the primacy of ethics, however diversely this assertion is made by different Jewish philosophers. Among the medieval Jewish philosophers, the assertion of the supremacy of God's volition is a basic point. Among the moderns,

Mendelssohn discerned Jewish particularity in the law, itself an expression of essentially rational morality. We have seen how even the Jewish Hegelians of the nineteenth century and certainly Cohen and his disciples proclaimed Kant's "primacy of practical reason." The traditionalist Jewish thinkers like Rabbi Kook and Rabbi Soloveitchik must, of course, always uphold the centrality of halakhah. Buber's and Heschel's thought emphasize the ethical and social demands made by the reality of the human-

18. Raphael Jospe, *What is Jewish Philosophy?*, pp. 60-61.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-65.

divine encounter. And at the present time, all of Levinas' work centers on the ultimacy of the ethical God "beyond essence."<sup>20</sup>

It can be argued that some scholars see no uniform tradition because they lack the perspective of the fundamental essence which alone can frame the apparent diversity as different modes of the same substantial assertion of the primacy of ethics.

Finally, Schwarzschild would see no problem in a Jewish cake made of non-Jewish ingredients. The Jewish way of baking suffices to make it Jewish. The mere assertion of the supremacy of ethics (what he liked to call "the Jewish twist") radically changes the nature of the philosophy in question no matter how extensively other parts of it (metaphysics, logic, etc.) are borrowed from non-Jewish philosophy (Maimonides is the main example).

Zev Levy raises specific criticisms to Cohen's (so also to Schwarzschild's) view that "Jewish philosophy deals with general philosophical problems from the point of view of the Jewish religion and its sources."<sup>21</sup> He argues that (1) the historical fact is the other way round, namely that Jewish religion is philosophically dealt with by secular philosophy, and (2) that Cohen's view "would exclude most of the medieval and modern Jewish philosophers."<sup>22</sup> Jospe also makes a similar point, arguing that essentialist characterizations of Jewish philosophy allow the paradox of disagreements among Jewish philosophers (the philosophy of the Jew, Spinoza, sharply conflicts with that of the Jew, Cohen, who is a disciple of the non-Jew Kant). Furthermore, the essentialist view is prescriptive instead of descriptive, and, therefore, incapable of accounting for the diversity of Jewish philosophers.

First, Schwarzschild would dispute that the exclusion determined by his criterion is as large as it is suggested by Levy's second objection (see the quotation from him above). Second, I think that he would have no problem at all in excluding from the tradition of Jewish philosophy those philosophers who, although Jews by birth, do not assert the primacy of ethics. Likewise, Schwarzschild does not hesitate in calling "Jewish philosophers" those non-Jews who assert the primacy of ethics (see, for instance, his article entitled "Sartre, the Jew").

To qualify as "problems" of an essentialist perspective, the fact that it excludes some Jews who were philosophers, that the diversity of Jewish philosophies cannot be accounted for, and that it entails the "paradox" of agreement between Jewish and non-Jewish philosophers, is to miss the point of the essentialist's criterion. The essentialist rejects the biographic criterion, so that it cannot be presupposed in an objection to him. Although most members of the, say, Frankfurt schools are "Frankfurters," it is not a contradiction to consider as a member a non-

20. Schwarzschild, "Modern Jewish Philosophy," p. 634.

21. Levy, *Op. cit.*, p. 111.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

Frankfurter whose philosophy shares some fundamental principles with those universally acknowledged as held by this school of thought. Schwarzschild would argue that the same holds for Jewish philosophy.

Jospe and Levy themselves reject the biographic criterion, on the grounds that some Jews by birth, philosophers like Bergson and Husserl, cannot be considered Jewish philosophers insofar as their philosophies are unrelated to Judaism. Now, in order to determine what philosophies are to be considered as related to Judaism, one must appeal to some criterion of Judaism. Even if Schwarzschild's criterion is more restrictive than Jospe's and Levy's, the same problem of exclusion is present in both positions.

In fact, I think that Schwarzschild's position in this regard is more consistent. Jospe says that to be a Jew is a necessary but not sufficient condition to be a Jewish philosopher.<sup>23</sup> But if so, why not go all the way, as Schwarzschild does, and admit that non-Jews who hold the philosophical position characteristic of Jewish philosophy, or, to meet Jospe's criterion, whose philosophy "deals with Jewish and philosophic sources," are, as well, Jewish philosophers?

The remaining criticisms to be considered, namely, that Schwarzschild's view is inconsistent with the historical relation of Judaism with philosophy, and that it is prescriptive instead of descriptive, offer the occasion for addressing Schwarzschild's Neo-Kantianism. In the following passage, he responds to the criticism that Cohen's view is historically implausible.

When critics then argue that there are important elements in Jewish texts and experience that conflict with Cohen's version of Judaism — such as ultimate particularistic loyalties, irrationalities, and even immoralities —, Cohen would reply that he is, of course, entirely, indeed, painfully aware of these historical anomalies but that the point of philosophy is to change the world and, therefore, also to moralize, to "idealize" historical Judaism.<sup>24</sup>

The historical submission of Judaism to secular philosophy does not compromise Schwarzschild's positive view of Jewish philosophy, because he understands this cognitive process in terms of Marburg Neo-Kantian "idealization." Most scholars understand this historical process in positivistic terms: an external and alien tradition of systematic rational inquiry (philosophy) takes Judaism as an objective given and submits it to philosophical analysis. From this perspective it is, indeed, hard to see how a genuine Jewish *philosophy* can be vindicated. But, from the Marburg Neo-Kantian perspective, the starting point is not a given reality but concepts. Concepts, such as "Judaism", are ideal constructions

23. Raphael Jospe, "Defining Jewish Philosophy . . .," p. 320.

24. Steven S. Schwarzschild, "'Germanism and Judaism' — Hermann Cohen's Normative Paradigm of the German-Jewish Symbiosis," in D. Bronsen (ed.), *Jews and Germans from 1860 to 1930: The Problematic Symbiosis* (Heidelberg, 1979), p. 151.

built by the philosopher in order to make reality intelligible. They are constructed through the selection of aspects of reality capable of forming a rational whole. Reality is thereby “purified” or “idealized.” The ultimate aim of this cognitive operation is, according to Schwarzschild, eminently practical: the attempt to transform reality after the constructed rational model.

All concepts . . . are the rational, conceptual utilizations of some set or other of “givens” (or *sensa*), sensible and historical, in the form of prescriptive notions, whose purpose is “practical” in one way or another — that is, a challenge to scientific investigation or to moral action.<sup>25</sup>

So, as to the charge that his view is prescriptive, Schwarzschild would reply, first, that it cannot be any other way, since this is a requirement of any cognitive activity; and second, that in the case of Judaism and Jewish philosophy, this ought to be the case, for its ultimate practical purpose is to put forth a challenge to moral action. Cohen says that the point of philosophy is to change the world. Schwarzschild would add that this is also the point of Judaism — perhaps not of historical Judaism in its particularistic elements and aspects, but of “idealized” or enlightened Judaism, that is, of Jewish philosophy, including some of the Prophets. Once “idealized” as a concept,

[Judaism is] not simply accepted in the crude forms of their historically conditioned givenness. [It], too, [is] subjected to the philosophical, rational, ethical process of “purification.” One could write a history of the Jewish concept of an “*emunah zeruphah*” (refined, purified faith) from before the times of the Biblical prophets through, of all people, R. Yehudah Halevi and Nachman Krochmal in the 19th century. In any case, at the hands of Hermann Cohen it comes to mean, in the strict Kantian sense of the term “*rein*,” the processing of the empirical and historical facts by *a priori* reason, so as to select, cleanse, and order them into a ratio-morally desirable “system.”<sup>26</sup>

This cognitive-normative process is stated in explicit philosophical language by Kant and the Neo-Kantians. But it characterizes prophetic, rabbinic, and Jewish philosophical intellectual/exegetical activity from Philo to Levinas. There is no substantial difference, according to Schwarzschild, between the Talmud and, say, Maimonides’ *Guide*. Both are instances of “the processing of the empirical and historical fact [of Judaism] so as to select, cleanse, and order them into a ratio-morally desirable ‘system.’” Judaism must be taken as a “regulative idealization,” “entailing the categorical challenge that the most strenuous efforts must be made to narrow this gap.”<sup>27</sup> “Judaism,” the concept, is a “regulative ideal,” towards which the exegesis undertaken by Jewish philosophers is directed. Judaism is therefore, continuously enlightened or purified. Therefore, the fact that secular philosophy is used as a tool in this

25. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 147.



process does not compromise the original Jewishness of its rational *modus operandi* and of its ethical aim.

Schwarzschild could still add that most of the scholars' attention is restricted to the process itself and not to that which is thereby generated: enlightened Judaism. Examination of the latter would show that the cognitive process of enlightenment is equivalent to the classical Jewish one of purification of the faith, and that enlightened Judaism does provide a philosophical point of view, that of the primacy of practical reason. That this point of view is stated in explicit philosophical terms only in the eighteenth century by Kant explains why Schwarzschild thinks that Jewish philosophy is not the tail on the kite of secular philosophy but the string that leads it.

#### IV

Toward the end of his life, Schwarzschild attempted to square Jewish mysticism and Yehudah Halevi with his own view of Jewish philosophy. As indicated in section I, possibly because of the apparent subordinated status of Judaism vis-à-vis philosophy in Jewish philosophy, some scholars have identified the quiddity of Jewish thought in Halevi and Jewish mystics, who either opposed rationalism or denounced it, as insufficient to account for the peculiar religious phenomenon of Judaism.

In the same way that Schwarzschild approximates Judaism and philosophy, he approximates Jewish mysticism and rationalism. He argues, first, that, historically, "there is no Jewish philosopher that has not been turned very quickly into a mystic," which suggests the compatibility between Jewish philosophy and mysticism.<sup>28</sup> He then locates this compatibility in the Platonic/Neo-Platonic background that is shared by both traditions, and in the fact that both start from "essentially the same texts, . . . problems, and even the same broad world-view,"<sup>29</sup> namely, Jewish culture. Despite the different lines along which Jewish mysticism and Jewish philosophy unfold, he points out that

[d]epending on a number of historical, religious, and cultural variables, they also regularly come together again, find that they have in the meantime preserved a largely shared vocabulary, body of thought, and of values, and they can, therefore, translate into one another's language what they have been saying in their own respective ways.<sup>30</sup>

The ultimate ground of this commensurability is the belonging of both to

[c]lassical Jewish thought [which] is committed to the belief in the absolutely transcendent God, Who is related to the human world only through His

28. Schwarzschild, "An Introduction . . .," p. 258.

29. Ibid., p. 260.

30. Ibid.

imperatives ... to the end of the messianic achievement, in the interaction of God and Israel, of the Kingdom of God on the earth.

Whereas Jewish rationalist philosophers translate this belief in terms of *theologia negativa* (Maimonides, Cohen, etc.) and “philosophical ethics,” that is, subordination of metaphysics to ethics, the Kabbalists express it

through the (negative) withdrawal of the divine name from the empirical word, the (ethical) purification of the world [through observance of the Commandments as explicated in the Oral Law] in preparation for the return of God (and His Name) to the world, and the consummation of the process of the return when the Name takes up residence, as it were, in the human world again totally and universally.<sup>31</sup>

In sum, the cognitive-normative process of “idealization” of the world characterizes the thought not only of most Jewish philosophers but also of most Jewish mystics. If accurate, Schwarzschild’s analysis constitutes another proof that it is Judaism, not secular philosophy, which leads the kite.

Yehudah Halevi’s supposed anti-rationalism is a stumbling-block to Schwarzschild’s view of Jewish philosophy. Would this major medieval figure in Judaism, often considered the most Jewish of the Jewish philosophers, remain excluded from Schwarzschild’s definition of Jewish philosophy? In his last work, unfortunately left unfinished, he attempted to provide an interpretation of Halevi’s *Kuzari* that would be compatible with his own view of Judaism and Jewish philosophy.

In a footnote to his 1985 essay on R. Isaac Hutner, Schwarzschild hints at the interpretation which he develops in the unfinished paper:

[M]uch talk about “irrationalism” in the history of Jewish thought, for example with respect to R. Yehudah Halevi, would become supererogatory. What R. Yehudah Halevi seems to reject in Book I of the *Kuzari* as rationalism, he resurrects, in its very Aristotelian language, in Book 5 — the difference being that in the meantime reason has been religiously enlightened. Not reason but the nature of reason is at issue.<sup>32</sup>

In “Proselytism and Ethnicism in R. Yehudah Halevi,” Schwarzschild specifies the nature of reason that is at issue. The reason which is rejected in Book I is Greek theoretical reason. The reason which is resurrected in Book 5 is Jewish practical reason. Halevi thereby performs the “Jewish twist” that is characteristic of Jewish philosophy. Despite the Aristotelian language employed, this twist leads to a substantially different philosophy, in which the volitional Jewish God who commands moral behavior takes primacy.

According to Schwarzschild, the “divine substance,” which Halevi attributes only to Jews, is practical reason, “the capacity to arrive at (‘hear’) imperatives (‘commands’) and to determine one’s will in accord-

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., p. 268.

ance with them.”<sup>33</sup> Its biological status in Halevi is explained away by the influence, pervasive in the period, of Neo-Platonic metaphysics, which hypostatizes concepts and faculties as ontological entities. Furthermore, and this was particularly important for Schwarzschild, the racism or ethnicism usually identified in Halevi’s theory of the “divine substance” is also done away with by this Neo-Kantian interpretation.<sup>34</sup> Halevi says that in the messianic age all men will be Jews, that is, all will have the “divine substance.” For Schwarzschild, this messianic age is equivalent to Kant’s kingdom of God, and the process leading towards it, a process to which Halevi is entirely committed, is the process of moralization or “idealization” in which “the most strenuous efforts [are] made to narrow [the] gap [between the *real*, still not wholly rational/ethical behavior, and the *ideal*, wholly ethical one] urgently and increasingly.”<sup>35</sup> During the pre-messianic age, only Jews can fully acknowledge and yield to the primacy of practical reason. In the messianic age, this condition becomes universal.

Halevi is now seen to move away fast from the mystical, anti-rationalistic, anti-humanistic place that has commonly been assigned to him, and instead to take his place in the main-line of Jewish and, indeed, some Gentile thinkers — even Maimonides and Hermann Cohen, the Platonic Socrates rather than Aristotle, Kant and even Karl Marx; i.e., the Rihal [Halevi] now affirms “the primacy of practical reason,” that the world ought be changed rather than merely understood — that philosophy is the search for virtue more importantly than for truth, and that God’s law rather than His quiddity is the concern of Judaism.<sup>36</sup>

One may, of course, raise objections to Schwarzschild’s efforts to square the Kabbalists and Halevi (and even some Jewish rationalist philosophers) in his view of Judaism and Jewish philosophy. He was fully aware of the unconventionality of his interpretation of Halevi, and told me that my disagreement with it was shared by friends of his to whom he had shown the draft (and let me note, in passing, that he welcomed

33. Steven S. Schwarzschild, “Proselytism and Ethnicism in R. Yehudah HaLevy,” unpublished, p. 20.

34. Lippman Bodoff has recently also attempted to provide a more morally palatable account of Halevi’s alleged racism (“Was Yehudah Halevi Racist?” in JUDAISM, Vol. 38, No. 2 [Spring 1989]: 174-184), by calling attention to the despised status of Jewish faith in Halevi’s time, which Halevi attempts to uplift; by noting that, for Halevi, conversion to Judaism is not just a matter of belief but of “adherence to a nation . . . where facts of birth and genealogy continue to be relevant to this day” (p. 184); and by suggesting that Halevi’s belief in the biological uniqueness of Jews is consistent with his fundamental view that religious truth cannot be achieved by means of reason (p. 177; but cf. p. 178). (Schwarzschild argues that Halevi rejects theoretical reason but not practical reason). Bodoff mitigates Halevi’s racism by claiming that the difference between Jews by birth and converted Jews (the basis of Halevi’s alleged racism) is “limited to the particular matter of prophecy” (p. 183), and that this restriction was not only long since moot by Halevi’s time, but, in addition, *does not pass to the convert’s progeny* (pp. 181-83).

35. Schwarzschild, “Germanism and Judaism . . .,” p. 142.

36. Schwarzschild, “Proselytism and Ethnicism . . .,” p. 21.

the criticisms, and gave them all serious consideration). I think that perhaps Schwarzschild broadens too much the concept of reason in order to accommodate Halevi and the mystics. Also, it is not quite clear to me if and how the practical religious dimension vindicated by Halevi and Jewish mystics can be translated into, or accounted for, in terms of Kant's practical reason — not to mention the problems of justifying the primacy of ethics and the truth of scripture, however enlightened.

To carry these objections further would be to deviate from the main aim in this paper, which is to expound Schwarzschild's view of Jewish philosophy. Let me then add, by way of conclusion, that his position here depicted testifies to his deep commitment to humanistic and universal values as a Jew and as a philosopher — in short, as a Jewish philosopher as he understood the classical ones: equally and consistently committed to reason, ethics, and Judaism. The reader can verify this by him- or herself in the following passage from Schwarzschild's last work:

I want to try to salvage as much as I reasonably can from his [Halevi's] considerations, if only out of my commitment to the highest values of historic Jewish culture, without having to pay the price of "racism" (call it "ethnicism," if you prefer), which I am neither willing to do, regardless of historic facts, and which, in any event, I believe, after a lifetime of study devoted primarily to Judaism, to be quintessentially hostile to what Judaism is all about. (I do not mind admitting also that I have always found it extremely difficult to believe that someone of the stature of the Rihal [Halevi] in Judaism could have propounded fundamental doctrines that at least on the face of it seem so invidious and dangerous.) I admit beforehand that on the latter score I shall employ every possible reasonable exegetical, philosophical, and historical means that seems to be available in order to paint a portrait of the Rihal very different from the one that has been almost universally accepted. I do not deny that even to me my portrait sometimes looks prettified, too glossy: I, too, after all, am accustomed to the traditional picture, and I concede that I am trying very, perhaps too, hard. Let us — you and me —, however, see whether this will work. To the extent to which, at the end, it may not convince us — well, we shall at least have tried hard and in the process paid our honest respect to a great literary and historical personage.<sup>37</sup>

In the image of Jewish philosophy as the string that leads the kite of secular philosophy, it is ultimately the philosopher who controls the kite by handling the string. It flies high in Schwarzschild's hands.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

# *Spinoza in History*

*Review-Essay* by MICHAEL L. MORGAN

*Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason & The Adventures of Immanence* (2 vols.) by YIRMIYAHU YOVEL. Princeton, N.J. Princeton University Press, 1989.

YIRMIYAHU YOVEL'S TWO-VOLUME STUDY of Spinoza's Marrano background and his reception in subsequent European philosophy will surely be widely read. It is a double-barreled eulogy to a controversial modern philosopher whose posthumous career has involved both vigorous attack and passionate praise. In Yovel's hands Spinoza becomes a heroic heir to the Marranos, an adept at indirect statement and rhetoric and a revisionary redemptive thinker. Moreover, the conception of secular salvation that Spinoza develops and his naturalism pass into the philosophical tradition and become a staple of such thinkers as Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. By a process of historical transitivity, therefore, much of the most profound post-Enlightenment philosophy turns out to be an expression of Jewish integrity and courage, and Jewish secularism emerges as a decisive trope for post-modern intellectual culture. To be sure, Yovel does not explicitly say all of this, but his treatment of Spinoza's historical antecedents, and his wide-ranging account of Spinoza's influence, lead naturally to these romantic, almost mythic conclusions.

This picture of the powerful and pervasive influence of Marrano and, hence, Jewish imagination will surely appeal to many. Yovel may seem to be rectifying a neglect, if not a bias, that has failed to appreciate the rich Jewish and religious background of Spinoza's thought. Some may attribute this neglect to anti-Semitism, others to a tendency to spiritualize Jewish identity. Whatever the source, it is a neglect that Yovel may be seen to rectify, whether he has sought to do so or not.

Regardless of where one stands on this issue, one must nonetheless find Yovel's achievement disappointing, and I want to consider why this is so. Let me say at the outset that there is much of value in Yovel's work; the second volume especially is well worth reading; it partly overcomes the flaws in the first volume, and results in an overall treatment of Spinoza that is substantially enriched.

---

MICHAEL L. MORGAN is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Jewish Studies at Indiana University.

## I

Yovel's first volume is about Spinoza and his Marrano heritage. In the first several chapters, Yovel gives an account of the Marrano experience and of several chief expressions of it. His treatment is heavily indebted to others, especially to I.S. Rêvah, Richard Popkin, and Yosef Kaplan. His major points are these: the persecution of Spanish Jews led to several precise types of Marrano responses; among these was one that involved a new conception of salvation and what it required. This response also involved a type of religious naturalism in which nature and divinity were identified; it also incorporated a strategy of indirect presentation in which one's genuine views were couched in a more acceptable public rhetoric or "dual language and equivocation" (p. x).

In the final chapters of the first volume, Yovel tries to show how Spinoza, especially in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (TTP), employed an indirect rhetorical strategy to communicate with the masses, by reinterpreting Scripture in such a way that it expressed a moral faith. This moral faith, different from, but related to, philosophical ethics, is a strategy for achieving salvation and, hence, constitutes a type of moral religion akin to philosophical religion. The latter, moreover, elaborated in the final part of the *Ethica*, involves an account of scientific knowledge as an alternative and superior mode of salvation. All of this, Yovel claims, is similar to what was advocated by certain Marrano thinkers, and is present in Spinoza's writings.

Furthermore, as Yovel tries to show in his second volume, this same set of views and strategies, as the core of Spinozistic thought, influenced a number of the seminal thinkers in the subsequent philosophical and intellectual tradition — from Kant and Hegel to Nietzsche and Freud. To be sure, the role of God and religion differs in these thinkers, as does the relation between nature and reason. But, in all, there is an acknowledged indebtedness to Spinoza, to his rationalism, his naturalism, and his special kind of intellectual integrity.

Yovel's first volume, *The Marrano of Reason*, has a brief prologue, an epilogue, and five central chapters. The prologue deals with the background, causes, and character of Spinoza's excommunication, the epilogue with "Spinoza's Jewish self-image" and his relation to Judaism and the Jewish people. Chapters 2-4 are about the Marrano world, Chapter 5 about Spinoza's use of rhetorical devices and his treatment of the multitude or masses, and Chapter 6 about his special conception of the highest type of knowledge, regarded as a mode of salvation.

In the second volume, *The Adventures of Immanence*, Yovel turns to the career of Spinozism as a "philosophy of immanence." In successive chapters, he discusses Spinozist themes in Kant, Hegel, Heine, Hess, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. He concludes with an outline of a phi-

losophy of immanence and finitude that is indebted to Spinoza and the Spinozist tradition.

## II

The bulk of Yovel's first volume contains an account of the Marrano experience, its religious and theological expressions, and ways in which this experience gave rise to modes of Biblical interpretation, literature, and so forth.<sup>1</sup> This account is informative, and provides the reader with an understanding of one dimension of Spinoza's background with which many will not be familiar.

There are, however, problems with Yovel's account. First, as I mentioned above, his treatment is largely derivative from the important work of R  vah, Kaplan, and Popkin, among others.<sup>2</sup> By itself, of course, this is no criticism, especially if the work he draws upon is sound and responsible. But, since Yovel's own account is so substantially a report of the findings of others, it is surprising that it should take up so much of his book, indeed, about sixty percent of the first volume. Yovel is trained as a philosopher and a historian of philosophy; there is nothing wrong with his using the historical work of others in order to develop an account of Spinoza's historical context. But good judgment suggests that the summary of their work, even if it does involve small modifications or revisions, be economical and conducted in a way that illuminates and does not overwhelm the philosopher's own examination of Spinoza in the light of such a context. In Yovel's case, the account of the Marrano background is simply excessive. It contains too much, and disperses, rather than focusses, the reader's attention. It is unnecessary, for example, given the important work of R  vah, Popkin, and Kaplan, to discuss at length the main features of the work of Da Costa, de Prado, and La Peyr  re. Nor is it necessary to do more than quickly identify the themes of Fernando de Roja's work, *La Celestina*; to devote a long chapter to it, even though most readers will

1. Chapters 1 and 7, which are largely historical, deal with Spinoza, his *herem*, and his relation to Judaism. Chapter 5 deals with the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (TTP), and Chapter 6 with the third kind of knowledge in the *Ethica*; hence, the discussion of Spinoza's writings is very specific, focussed, and limited. Chapters 2-4, a total of 113 pages out of 204, deal with the Marrano background that, Yovel argues, provides the most important context for understanding Spinoza's philosophy.

2. Yovel frequently cites the work of these scholars, and he seems to note when he differs with them and why. As to whether they are fully and correctly cited, see, e.g., Richard H. Popkin, "Notes from Underground," *The New Republic* (May 21, 1990): 35-41. My point is the basic one that an historian of philosophy, using the scholarly results of others in order to display the historical background for his work, needs to be economical in presentation.



not be familiar with the work, is simply unnecessary.<sup>3</sup> Given the relatively small space devoted to a discussion of Spinoza's own work and the almost total lack of careful textual treatment of Spinoza's writings, the enormous amount of space granted to a summary of largely established results shows a lack of judgment.

Second, Yovel, one must assume, seeks to shed light on Spinoza's thought by clarifying a relatively neglected aspect of his background. Once again, there is nothing wrong with such a strategy, as long, that is, as it is carried out with a good sense of balance. Spinoza is an incredibly rich thinker. Those who have studied him have often used very precise vehicles to provide them with access to his thinking, from Maimonides and medieval Jewish philosophy to Descartes and Hobbes. At this stage in our understanding of Spinoza, a nearly exclusive attention to one dimension of his background cannot but distort his achievements, his difficulties, and so forth. Yovel makes Spinoza a Marrano of Reason, but he is much more than that, and perhaps not even that or primarily that, when viewed against a fuller account of his historical and intellectual background.

There are, of course, many ways in which a thinker indicates his indebtedness to the past. At times, he directly refers to works or authors; at other times, he uses phrases or expressions or concepts from works that he has read or that he has been informed about in letters or conversation or in other written form. Sometimes an author's library is an indication of what was available to him and suggestive of what he might have read; sometimes we have mention in letters of works loaned to him or recommended by others. We could go on, but the point is that there are a variety of ways of identifying intellectual influence. One of the weakest ways, although one widely used, is to develop a set of views that were discussed in a period prior to the author's or contemporary with him, and to point to ways in which his own writings manifest similarities. In this type of case, the evidence is very circumstantial, and one is led to wonder if the similarities or parallels are not coincidental. It must be said that Yovel's case is basically such a circumstantial one. As he labors to paint the mural of Spinoza's Marrano heritage, he does not show in a convincing way that Spinoza himself refers to, or is otherwise indebted to, that past in any explicit way. What he shows is that, once we have identified certain themes of the Marrano experience, we can see similar themes manifest in Spino-

3. Chapter 4, which is wholly devoted to an account and interpretation of *La Celestina*, is 43 pages long, about one-fifth of the book, and virtually the same length as the two chapters devoted to Spinoza's philosophy. What makes this excessiveness all the more remarkable is that the chapter introduces no new themes to the interpretation of Spinoza, and discusses a work only distantly relevant even to the task of sketching the Marrano world.

za's thinking.<sup>4</sup> Yovel provides us with little reason to think that Spinoza saw himself, or that others saw him, as a Marrano thinker.

Furthermore, Yovel does not, as one might hope, begin with references in Spinoza — perhaps in his letters or in the early biographical accounts of his life — and trace these back to features of Spinoza's intellectual and historical world. If he had, he would have considered, along with the Marrano background, the importance, for understanding Spinoza's *Tractatus*, of Hobbes *De Cive*, Calvin's *Institutes*, of Cicero, Epictetus, Grotius, Lipsius, Machiavelli, Seneca, and Tacitus. All of these authors and works, I might add, are listed among those which Spinoza himself had in his library. While this is no guarantee that he read them or that they meant something special to him, it is proof that Spinoza was at least aware of them and, hence, a clue worth considering seriously.<sup>5</sup>

Of special interest, I believe, is the possibility that Spinoza was influenced importantly by Stoic thought and, especially, the forms of Neostoicism that go back to Justus Lipsius and the publication of *De Constantia* in 1584. Spinoza did not have this work in his library, nor did he have either Lipsius' summary of Stoic ethics, the *Manuductio*, or of Stoic physics, the *Physiologia*, of 1604. But it is certain that Spinoza knew of Lipsius and of Stoic thought, through his editions of Seneca and Tacitus, and was aware of the work of du Vair, Charron, and Montaigne, through Descartes at least. Indeed, Spinoza's views on providence, nature, and God, might usefully be viewed, not only against the Marrano background, but also against the background of Lipsius' attempt to reconcile Christian theology with Stoic views on these matters. Unlike Hobbes, for example, who denies free will, naturalizes the notion of miracles, but retains some room for mystery in Christian faith, Spinoza's naturalism and his critical appropriation of religious vocabulary, both Jewish and Christian, allow him to use, almost verbatim, Stoic terminology and principles. In part, no doubt,

4. Yovel either does not see how weak his case is, or recognizes its weakness but wants us to treat it as stronger than it is. At the beginning of Chapter 5, having completed his discussion of the Marrano world, he says, "The preceding chapters have shown the origin in Marrano culture of some of Spinoza's most characteristic traits: skepticism toward historical religion, an immanent metaphysics, the use of dual language, and the quest for an alternative way to salvation" (128). The meaning of this statement is not clear, but if it means to claim that the best account of the presence of these traits in Spinoza's life and thought involves specifying his relationship to Marrano culture, then it is surely an extraordinary overstatement of what the earlier chapters have shown.

It is also worth noting that Yovel is not consistent and clear about what his survey of Marrano culture is intended to show about Spinoza. In the Preface to the second volume, for example, he refers to these features as "a this-worldly disposition, a split religious identity, metaphysical skepticism, a quest for alternative ways to salvation that oppose the official doctrine, an opposition between inner belief and the outer world, and a gift for dual language and equivocation" (x). The differences between this list and that quoted above are, at best, confusing.

5. Another strategy would be to show that libraries to which Spinoza had access or which he frequented had certain works by certain authors.

this is a result of Spinoza's more rigorous metaphysical and physical views. Minimally, Spinoza occurs as a systematically powerful figure in the early modern tradition that seeks to reconcile Western religious terms and principles with ancient thought, but through the vehicle of the new natural philosophy. Hobbes, on the one side, and Leibniz, on the other, show the extent and limitations of what Spinoza is able to accomplish in this effort at reconciliation.

Moreover, one cannot place Spinoza's ethics and religious thinking in an historical context without attending to the work of Hobbes and Grotius and the theologico-political developments in the Dutch states vis à vis Dutch republicanism and the role of Dutch Calvinism in it. To claim to be historically attentive, as Yovel seems to do, and yet to treat Spinoza's ethics and religious thought without attention to these matters is to be very narrow, indeed.

Nor is he much better when he turns to Spinoza himself. In his two chapters on Spinoza's philosophy, one in which he focusses on his rhetorical method in the *Tractatus*, and the other in which he examines Spinoza's epistemology and the third kind of knowledge, Yovel paints with broad strokes and avoids that close, detailed encounter with the texts that is demanded in such a work.<sup>6</sup> We already have books that treat Spinoza in introductory and comprehensive ways; Hampshire and, especially, Allison come to mind. What is needed here is a more fine-grained, nuanced philosophical analysis of texts.

Yovel's discussion of Spinoza's audience and rhetorical strategy in the TTP is especially disappointing, precisely because it begins in a promising way and then stops short of its goal without realizing its deficiencies. Yovel starts well, distinguishing different conceptions of religiosity that Spinoza acknowledges and considering the proper audience or audiences of the *Tractatus*. His goal, in part, is to show that Spinoza, like the Marranos, uses indirect techniques in order to speak simultaneously to different audiences.<sup>7</sup>

But Yovel does not think through the structure and argument of the *Tractatus* sufficiently to ask where its core is and, hence, what is decisive about its rhetoric. Yovel is right that Spinoza recognizes, on the one hand, the common person as vulgar and superstitiously religious; such a person is dogmatic and rigid, beyond the purview of persuasion and cooperative debate. On the other, Spinoza has developed, primarily in the *Ethica*, a

6. As far as it goes, Chapter 6, which is a brief sketch of Spinoza's metaphysics and epistemology, with a focus on the nature and role of the third type of knowledge, is well done. It is, however, a brief overview and not a detailed, rigorously argued account.

7. Yovel says this: "In having this practical and even performative side, the *Theologico-Political Treatise* uses several levels of discourse simultaneously, addresses different audiences in the same text, exploits the connotations of familiar words to serve radically new purposes and, in general, uses language in ways other than pure description and philosophical reasoning" (136). On pp. 141-150 he then elaborates Spinoza's uses of rhetoric and the strategy of "dual language."

lofty notion of rational piety, a philosophical-scientific religion of nature, the goal of which is ideal moral conduct, the highest form of scientific knowledge, rational independence, and something called *amor intellectualis dei*. The chief interpretive questions that first face the reader of the TTP, then are: at whom is it aimed? what is its goal? and how does it seek to achieve that goal? In my mind, the goal is to convert the primary reader to a form of piety that we might call Scriptural Religion and which Spinoza calls “the universal faith of all mankind.” As Yovel notes, this type of religiosity is based on Scriptural teaching and, I might add, authority; it is basically a moral faith of justice and benevolence; and it is a *universal* or common faith, a kind of natural religion both accessible to, and binding for, all human beings. Spinoza’s strategy is to show that one can be persuaded to the existence and imperative force of this natural religion through a cultivated reading of Scripture, i.e., of the literary documents that founded two Western, positive or historical religious communities. One can, that is, ascend from subjectivity to objectivity, or, perhaps better, from historical particularity to transcendent universality — or, at least, near to it.

This leaves the interpreter with two questions: first, exactly who is the primary audience for such an attempt, i.e., to be persuaded through a very precise reading of Scripture to the binding nature of a kind of moral faith? and second, what would persuade such a reader to agree to the type of interpretive method or hermeneutic that would provide such a result? Although he does discuss Spinoza’s Biblical hermeneutic in volume two (9-19), Yovel is not helpful in answering either of these questions.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, they are not unconnected. Once we see, that is, that, in Chapters VII and XV, Spinoza seeks to defend his method of interpretation as neither dogmatic nor rational-reductive and to show why it, rather than the methods of Alphakar or Maimonides, ought to be preferred, we can appreciate two things about the audience at which these arguments are aimed. The first thing is that the audience, while committed to the authority of Scripture, also recognizes the role of reason or the “natural light” in helping one’s understanding of what knowledge is and how one can gain it. The second thing is that the audience already, in a sense, admits the compelling nature of scientific understanding, for the arguments for Spinoza’s

8. Yovel seems to think that the most important question to answer is how Spinoza speaks to several audiences at once, and uses rhetorical devices to do so. This is a Maimonidean type of question, and it does have its importance, although limited, I think, in the context of Spinoza’s writing. Moreover, it leads Yovel to think that the Scriptural language which Spinoza employs is not really serious. Yovel says that “the use of pious phrases, images, and formulae, borrowed from the Scriptures or from accepted religious beliefs,” is “one of the most efficient masks” used by the philosopher to mask “his true aim and intentions” (142). But, to the audience of the work, it clearly is serious; Scripture is the grounds for accepting the universal moral faith, and for believing that it is true. If the philosopher wants to persuade the audience to moral faith, then the use of Scripture is no mask of his true aims but, rather, the vehicle for achieving them.

naturalistic and historical method assume that the Bible is a book like any other, and a natural object to be understood like any other. Such a person, that is, is not a philosopher, but does have a sympathy for philosophy; at the same time, such a person is religiously committed in a historical sense. He is either a Jew or a reformed Christian, loyal to the past, to canonical documents, and to God, but also impressed by the recent scientific developments in Italy, Holland, England, France, and elsewhere. In the last paragraph of the Preface to the TTP, Spinoza warns that the book is not intended for the masses who are constrained by prejudice and superstition; neither is it intended for those traditional theologians who treat philosophy and reason as the handmaidens of theology. Rather, it is aimed at those whom he calls "Philosophical Readers," and whom I have just tried to describe. As an effort, then, to reconcile natural philosophy or science with Western religion or faith, eternity with history, and subjectivity with objectivity, however, one must wonder if the TTP is successful, or even could be. But this is a question that must be deferred for another time.

Yovel's own reading of the TTP makes the use of Scripture and religious imagery, etc., a rhetorical device for concealing the philosopher's true convictions and aims from the masses. In part, it may do that. But the Biblical hermeneutic that Spinoza develops is also, and primarily, designed to persuade his special reader to a commitment to universal moral faith, and this is a positive and important goal. In his first volume, Yovel focusses on the negative purposes of Scripture, I think, because he wants to see the TTP as a Marrano document, as it were, as an exemplification of Spinoza's tactic of using language to speak to more than one audience simultaneously. But, at best, this is a subordinate feature of the TTP, and one that Spinoza could have learned from someone like Machiavelli or Hobbes as much as from Marrano culture. Then, in the second volume, when Yovel returns to the TTP in his comparison with Kant, he focusses on the way in which Spinoza's Biblical interpretation and political theory involves a purification of religion, but he does not clarify exactly how Scripture is used to persuade the reader to advance along the road between vulgar religion and philosophical piety.

These are rather large concerns about Yovel's whole approach, that would present themselves even if his account of Spinoza's Marrano background were, itself, without difficulties. In fact, his account is riddled with problems. Early in his discussion of Marranism, for example, he notes that the statement "salvation lies not in Christ but in the Law of Moses" was "like a dogma of [the Judaizing Marranos'] hidden religion and a succinct description of their faith" (20). Yovel then claims that an interest in salvation is foreign to Judaism — itself a strange and questionable thing to say — and that "turning to salvation as their central religious concern" was a Marrano response to their situation and a result of their Catholic education. This line of reasoning develops into Yovel's claim that "Spino-

za reiterated a strong Marrano pattern in his attachment to an alternate way to salvation" (36), and his denial that Spinoza could have inherited this notion of salvation from antiquity or from Christianity directly. Much of this is questionable, I believe, but suppose that we accept it. Even if it is true, as Yovel claims, that "Marranos saw their secret religion as an alternative way to salvation" (38), it hardly follows that Spinoza was chiefly indebted to the Marranos for his terminology of salvation or indebted to his Marrano background at all for such language.

This line of thinking is made all the more confusing by Yovel's remark that, "in this respect, Spinoza resembles Plato . . . [a rationalist] seeking to attain semi-mystical results by the power of reason" (37). Why not, one might ask, follow the trail from Plato's convictions about the nature and role of knowledge to those of Aristotle and then the Stoics whom, Yovel himself admits, Spinoza "did know and absorbed" (36)? In other words, why not think that Spinoza combined in his own unique way the traditional religious vocabulary of salvation, inherited from Judaism and familiar through Christianity, the Stoic conception of the knowledge of God and nature, and his own way of understanding the new science and its metaphysical foundations? This is not just an alternative to Yovel's story about the Marrano role in Spinoza's conception of salvation; it is a story that Yovel himself identifies and ignores without serious consideration or justification.<sup>9</sup>

In a sense, then, Yovel's attempt to be historically sensitive and, at the same time, to expose both the rhetorical-historical and philosophical features of Spinoza's thought, both fail. The first volume suffers from twin faults, too much detail when unnecessary and too little when required.

### III

In his methodological essays and in his brilliant studies of Macchiavelli, Harrington, Burke, and others, J.G.A. Pocock has shown how the historian can locate and delineate modes of discourse and intellectual paradigms — the Kuhnian language is intentional — and trace their employment, interaction, and conflicts in the course of a tradition of writing and thinking. In a sense, Yovel's second volume is an attempt to do this for

9. Among the several Marrano themes, that Yovel finds exemplified in Spinoza's life and works, is a commitment to toleration. It is certainly possible that Spinoza inherited from his parents, family, and religious community a disposition to toleration that ultimately has roots in Marrano experience. But, surely, there are other factors that should be discussed in trying to understand his commitment to toleration, among them the pluralism of Dutch political and cultural life, the discussion of toleration in the works of Grotius, Hobbes, and others, and the particular religious climate in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, especially in terms of relations with Rome and the Jesuits and the impact of the Thirty Years War. On the toleration question in sixteenth century Holland, see G. Güldner, *Das Toleranzproblem in den Niederlanden im Ausgang des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg: Luebeck, 1968).



the complex entity of Spinozism and its appropriation and contestations in subsequent Western philosophy and culture. In order to do this type of *Receptiongeschichte* well, one has to be extremely sensitive to how a set of motifs and concepts are being used and, indeed, when they are being used at all. In some cases Yovel does this well, and he finds Spinozistic themes consciously employed, appropriated, and reshaped. At other times, he is more opportunistic and even aggressive, finding Spinoza in the writings of others by giving one-sided or exaggerated interpretations.

Much of the second volume contains informed and interesting discussions of the Spinozist presence in post-Enlightenment culture. Here Yovel is at his best, for he has a good grasp of Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, et al., and economically locates those points where Spinozist themes are present and those where there is a radical dissonance with Spinoza. This strategy is especially well-employed in the chapter on Nietzsche, where Yovel nicely follows Nietzsche's appreciation of Spinoza with an account of how Nietzschean doctrines — the Will to Power, the freedom and joy of philosophizing, the death of God, his perspectivism and views about truth, and the eternal recurrence — veer away from Spinoza's more objectivist naturalism and his special type of religiosity.

Throughout the second volume, then, Yovel not only examines post-Enlightenment philosophers; he also adds more and more to his portrait of Spinoza and, except for a few occasions, he does this without any heavy-handed emphasis on Spinoza's Marrano heritage. The result is that, by the end of the second volume, Yovel's overall treatment of Spinoza has become substantially enriched, and this enrichment, in part, rectifies the insufficient treatment of Spinoza in the first volume.

In the Epilogue to his first volume, Yovel asks a strange question: is Spinoza the first secular Jew? In part, this question is puzzling because the notion of secularity is anachronistic regarding the seventeenth century, and Yovel clearly appreciates this fact. But it is also puzzling because Yovel has spent so much of his time trying to show that Spinoza was not, in fact, a secular thinker at all. To be sure, he claims that Spinoza uses

a series of classical Jewish motifs which he secularizes, severing them from their original context . . . [including] such notions as the eternity of Israel, the redemption, and the covenant with God. True, he invests each of these concepts with a new heterodox meaning, prosaic and subject to natural laws; yet the fact remains that he does preserve them in his new, secularized universe (194-95).

But in saying these things, Yovel never makes it clear what he means by secularity, what makes Spinoza's view a secular one, and his world a secular world. If the key issue is the denial of divinity, then, clearly, Spinoza is not secularist. If it is the denial of certain traditional religious beliefs, such as free choice and creation, then, clearly, he is. But part of the richness and excitement of Spinoza's thought comes from the very precise ways in which he revises religious commitments within philosophical con-



texts that *prima facie* seem resistant to them. Spinoza abandons divine transcendence, as he does traditional ways of understanding revelation, covenant, providence, and much else, but he does not abandon religion or faith. Yovel knows this, but, instead of emphasizing the remarkable subtlety of Spinoza's attempt to reconcile the tensions of his age, he rests his case on the fact that, in Spinoza's day, there was no alternative to a kind of traditional Judaism. This approach assumes that we understand what secularity means as a category for interpreting Spinoza. But we do not, nor does Yovel help us to such an understanding.

Hence, as Yovel tells us, while Spinoza was, in one sense, not a secular Jew, he "took the first step in the eventual secularization of Jewish life by examining it empirically as a natural phenomenon subject solely to the forces of secular history" (199). This confusing statement might very well be the judgment of an apologist for contemporary Jewish secularism who sees in Spinoza a source of ideas and inspiration. When the core of Judaism becomes political allegiance or ethnic attachment, then one source of such a conception of Judaism, shorn of transcendence and of divine chosenness and more, is a kind of social scientific account of religion, in general, and Judaism, in particular. Especially in the TTP, Spinoza encouraged such an approach and, hence, he takes a step on the road to such a view of modern Jewish secularism.

But Jewish life is not Jewish thought; it is life. The "eventual secularization of Jewish life" is not a function of philosophy or theology, except in the most indirect of senses. Spinoza is a seminal modern philosopher. He may be a Jewish thinker too, i.e., someone who reflects importantly on the character of Judaism and the Jewish People. But secular Jewish life was certainly beyond him, for it must wait for the proper historical and social world, one in which human conduct and public institutions and practices can be conducted independently of religious commitment and authority. What Spinoza has to teach us about Jewish secularism is much more complex than Yovel leads us to think.

Yovel, then, raises important questions about the relations among Judaism, Spinoza, and modern post-Enlightenment thought. His volumes reflect wide reading and a synoptic understanding of Spinoza, his background, and his influence. But they are seriously flawed. It may be true that Spinoza marks one important locus where Jewish experience influences Western culture and philosophy, but our ability to appreciate this fact and all it implies is not significantly advanced by Yovel's work.

***White Flower***  
**(For Osip Mandelstam)**

JEREMY HARMAN

Despair troubles your lips.  
Your stone feet are in shoes of earth  
and you sing  
no matter where.

In a lonely room in Leningrad.  
On midwinter Moscow streets.  
In a shack in Voronezh.

Your poems are grain  
we turn to bread.  
They are trees we cut  
to build.  
In their deepest phrases  
you have forever caught the past  
and now, after years of silence,  
you are still alive  
hidden inside  
their strongest speech.

One morning in Voronezh  
you saw the first snow  
had fallen.  
In your quiet soul  
a cold, white flower  
blossomed and began to die.

---

JEREMY HARMAN *is in private practice as a child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. He was born in Ireland and was raised as a Catholic.*

**Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism.** By M. HERBERT DANZGER. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989. 384 pp.

*Reviewed by* LIVIA BITTON-JACKSON

WHY DO YOUNG men and women from secular backgrounds make a commitment as exacting as the observance of Jewish law in the Orthodox manner? What is the motivation, what are the avenues, and how are the tools provided for such a consequential undertaking? The decision entails more than joining a community of faith or subscribing to a set of strict rules: it is a commitment to an all-embracing lifestyle. What are the forces that sustain such a momentous move? The fascinating phenomenon of return to tradition, the phenomenon of the *ba'al t'shuvah* (the Jews who "return" to traditional religious practices and beliefs), provokes many questions. Professor Danzger's book answers all of these questions, and even some I did not know I had.

This careful and comprehensive examination of the "*ba'al t'shuvah*" phenomenon is primarily a sociological study, but it is also the work of the historian and of the scholar. An appreciation of Jewish history and scholarship provide dimensions for this study which render it uniquely valuable as a tool for understanding this vital Jewish contemporary reality.

The historical perspectives themselves are multi-dimensional. The *ba'al t'shuvah* movement is presented against the backdrop of the contemporary general milieu, but it is also placed within the context

of other Jewish societal developments, and analyzed in view of historical antecedents, as well. Unlike many researchers who fall into the trap of ascribing historical developments to one or another celebrated cause, Professor Danzger is sensitive to the fact that "history does not hop on one foot but crawls on a thousand feet." As Salo Baron's famous remark implies, every historical phenomenon is the effect of not one but many different causes.

In the course of the historical review, we learn about the different branches of Judaism and their evolution. Through an extensive and informative focus on Orthodoxy, and through the author's definitions of terms and concepts, even the uninitiated reader is afforded a front-seat glimpse into the world of Orthodox Jewry. One gains an insight into the community of prayer and study of the *chasidische velt* (hasidic world) and the *yeshivische velt* (yeshivah world), and into the world of issues — the place of secular education, women, and the State of Israel, for example — pre-occupying the "modern Orthodox."

The reader learns of the general effect of the 1960's counterculture on the seekers of fulfillment, and the particularistic effect of simultaneous Jewish historical developments, notably the Six Day War. Israel's "miraculous" victory and the return to ancient Jewish shrines in Jerusalem sparked a passionate longing for return to tradition. The miracle of surviving a second threat of annihilation, a little over two decades after the Holocaust, inspired messianic fervor and opened the gates of *t'shuvah*, of return.

This book makes clear the distinction between the *t'shuvah* phenomenon and cults like the "Moonies" and Hari Krishna, that are frequently obscured by other researchers. Apart from the differ-

LIVIA BITTON-JACKSON is Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at Herbert H. Lehman College of the City University of New York.

ence explicitly stated, that unlike the aforementioned cults, the *t'shuvah* movement does not aim to alienate its adherents from their families, (though there may be many attendant tensions created), there is a major distinction implicit in the study. Instead of originating as an organized missionizing body, the *t'shuvah* phenomenon was actually created by the "seekers," and evolved as a process towards an end, not an end in itself. It was only in response to the seekers' clamor that an initially reluctant Orthodoxy, both in the United States and in Israel, signaled acceptance and developed an "outreach" program. This outreach, in the form of special curricula for "returnees," or *ba'alei t'shuvah*, at various *yeshivot*, gradually institutionalized the *ba'al t'shuvah* phenomenon. The phenomenon itself, however, never became a cult, but, rather, a channel for seekers of spirituality to join mainstream Judaism.

Danzger's comparison of *ba'alei t'shuvah* to "born-again" Christians, while identifying the former as seekers of redemption in this world and the latter as seekers of redemption in the world to come, points up an important difference between Judaism and Christianity — that is, between the humanity-orientation of the former and the divinity-orientation of the latter.

Professor Danzger's style is clear, compact and logical. There is an economy of expression which makes for pleasant reading and renders complex insights easy to grasp. He also provides the reader with some startling information in suggesting that between 10 to 25 percent of the currently Orthodox are *ba'alei t'shuvah*, and more than half of these are women. Simultaneously, he points out that this influx has been more than balanced by the outflow of the "born" Orthodox.

If so, the contemporary revival

of Orthodox Judaism under the impact of the *ba'al t'shuvah* phenomenon may prove to be but a first step towards a reshaping of tradition. The infusion of "fresh blood" on such a large scale cannot help but revitalize a community and exercise a far-reaching impact, unpredictable as yet in its consequences.

**JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1888-1988.** By JONATHAN D. SARNA. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989. 430 pp., \$29.95

*Reviewed by* MICHAEL N. DOBKOWSKI

AFTER SEVERAL false starts in the 1840s and 1860s, the intellectual and religious climate in the American Jewish community improved sufficiently so that the prospects for the establishment of a vital Jewish publication society seemed bright. On December 11, 1887, the young, charismatic, Philadelphia Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf, in a Sunday lecture entitled "The Need of the Hour," advocated the formation of a publication society to help increase Judaic literacy in the American Jewish community. This led to a meeting of delegates from local Philadelphia congregations, held in March 1888. There they decided to call for a national organizational meeting to which representative Jews from across the country would be invited to attend.

Several factors made this an opportune time for such an organization. Jewish learning was beginning to become more established in the rabbinical schools of Cincinnati (H.U.C.) and New York (J.T.S.). There was a general awakening of

---

MICHAEL N. DOBKOWSKI is Professor of Religious Studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

interest in Judaism and Jewish culture. Eastern European Jewish immigration was presenting both challenges and opportunities.

About one hundred interested Jews from various cities answered the appeal, and the group met in Philadelphia on June 3, 1888. It elected Morris Newburger, a member of Krauskopf's "Society of Knowledge Seekers" and a leading Philadelphia clothing wholesaler, as President, Krauskopf as secretary, and an executive committee with a distinct Philadelphia flavor. The publication committee consisted of people like Marcus Jastrow, Krauskopf, and Mayer Sulzberger, of Philadelphia; Cyrus Adler and Henrietta Szold of Baltimore; Bernhard Felsenthal of Chicago, and Abram S. Isaacs of New York. The new constitution of the Jewish Publication Society of America committed the Society "to publish works on the religion, literature and history of the Jews; and . . . to foster original work by American scholars on these subjects." In a balanced, remarkably thorough and intellectually incisive institutional and cultural history of the J.P.S., Jonathan D. Sarna has provided an informative description and analysis of the role that the Society has played in the preservation and advancement of American Jewish culture and life.

Representing as it did a range of religious, scholarly, and social interests, the Society strove for consensus. It sought to avoid books that were excessively partisan on the great religious and political issues of the day, such as Reform Judaism or Zionism, preferring instead, books that had a broad appeal and that reflected widely held values and interests. Often, that led to blandness and an unwillingness to publish works dealing with controversial subject matter.

From the beginning, the editorial board focused on historical

scholarship as a vehicle to demonstrate Jewish contributions to non-Jewish society, the evolutionary nature of the Jewish experience, and the theme of Jewish unity. Between 1891 and 1895 it published the five-volume English edition of Heinrich Graetz's monumental eleven volume *History of the Jews*. It added, in 1898, the important "Index Volume" that is found in no other edition. Over the years, the Society has published several briefer histories, such as *A History of the Jewish People* (1927) by Alexander Marx and Max Margolis, and Solomon Grayzel's *A History of the Jews from the Babylonian Exile to the End of World War II* (1947). In 1952, the Society arranged with the noted historian, Salo Baron, to reissue *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, a multi-volume work originally published in 1937 by Columbia University Press. The first two volumes were issued in 1952, and the eighteenth in 1983.

The Society has also published a significant number of important historical monographs and studies. Among them are Cecil Roth's *A History of the Marranos* (1932) and *A History of the Jews of Italy* (1946); Louis Finkelstein, *The Pharisees* (1938); Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society, 1714-1830* (1979); Stephen Poppe, *Zionism in Germany, 1897-1933* (1977); Robert Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina* (1979); Michael Pollak, *Mandarins, Jews, and Missionaries* (1980); Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews* (1975); and Yosef Haim Yerushalmi's *Haggadah and History* (1975), a broad survey of the evolution of the Haggadah, including 200 facsimile reproductions. Sarna not only lists these and many other publications, but he provides insightful descriptions and analyses of these works, the context and history of how and why they were issued, and the appropri-

ate human interest aspects of the enterprise. His book is, therefore, not a "narrow" history of the Society, but a history of the books and of the people who wrote, edited and published them, and their collective role in the developing American Jewish culture.

One of the Society's important contributions to American Jewish culture has been the publication of *The American Jewish Year Book*. Originally the idea of Cyrus Adler, it provides an annual survey and analysis of significant sociological, cultural and demographic developments and trends in American and World Jewish life. The first volume appeared in 1899, and it has been issued uninterruptedly since. The first ten volumes were issued by the Society alone; thereafter, the American Jewish Committee became involved in the project. Since 1949, the AJC has prepared the *Year Book* completely, with JPS acting as co-publisher.

The trustees of the Society were also early aware of the need for an acceptable and updated English translation of the *Tanakh*, based on the Masoretic text and acceptable to Jewish scholars. The Society appointed Marcus Jastrow as editor-in-chief, with the traditionalist Frederick de Sola Mendes and the Reform-minded Kaufmann Kohler as co-editors. Little was accomplished, however, until the Central Conference of American Rabbis joined the Society in furthering the project in 1908. A new board of editors was appointed, and they brought the project to fruition in 1917. *The Holy Scriptures/According to the Masoretic Text* . . . filled an urgent need and became one of the Society's best-selling volumes. Here, again, Sarna provides useful and detailed treatment of the evolution of the project, along with insights into the discussions that were held over textual and theological matters.

Around 1955, the JPS commissioned a committee of translators to undertake a new English rendering of the *Tanakh* to accommodate changes in language and usage and the new findings of Biblical scholarship. The first volume — *The Torah* — appeared in 1963; the second volume — *The Prophets* — in 1978; and the third — *The Writings* — in 1982. Not without its critics, the translation is one of the Society's most extraordinary scholarly achievements.

The J.P.S. has also published a number of important works dealing with the Talmud and other aspects of Judaic and Rabbinic literature. One of the most significant was Louis Ginzberg's six-volume study entitled *The Legends of the Jews* (1909-28), much of which had been translated from the German by Henrietta Szold. Sarna gives this remarkable woman proper scholarly credit by emphasizing her central, but generally unknown, role in this project, as well as in many others, during her tenure with the Society from 1893-1916. An index was prepared by Boaz Cohen in volume seven (1938), facilitating access to this rich collection of Aggadic literature. It is still in print and widely used.

The J.P.S. also issued important works on biography and autobiography, philosophy and theology, fiction, art books, poetry, and books for children, by people like Israel Zangwill, Sholom Asch, Leo Baeck, Martin Buber, Ludwig Lewisohn, Charles Resnikoff, A.M. Klein, Linda Heller, and Mira Meier. In 1979-80 it inaugurated a series of English translations of contemporary Hebrew poetry. It also published *The Jewish Catalog* in 1973, and its sequels in 1976 and 1980. Few Jewish books published in American have been as influential, and only one J.P.S. book — the Bible translation — has sold more copies annually.

The J.P.S., as Sarna has convincingly demonstrated, has accomplished much. Over the past century, it has been dedicated to the furthering of Jewish publishing and the cultivation of Jewish scholarship and literacy. It certainly has been an important factor in the preservation, even stimulation, of Jewish culture in America. If Sarna can be criticised in this otherwise impressively researched, smoothly written and often suggestive volume, it is for the excessive claims which he makes for the centrality of the J.P.S. in the development of American Jewish culture and scholarship. This is the temptation faced by all who write institutional histories. Sarna was certainly aware of this problem, and he basically avoided uncritical celebration.

However, this reader is still troubled by statements such as "practically alone, it (JPS) championed the idea of a unified cultural tradition, rooted in history, ideas, values, and sacred texts . . . ." Having insight now into the "players" involved, their motivations, strengths as well as foibles, because of Sarna's wonderful book, this assertion, as well as some others, seems to be exaggerated. Nevertheless, this is an important book, rich in information and intelligence, that provides a valuable perspective on an important chapter in the "Americanization of Jewish culture." It certainly lives up to the high standards of scholarship, literary quality, and objectivity that have been insisted upon by the J.P.S. during these last one hundred years.



# NEW AND AUTHORITATIVE

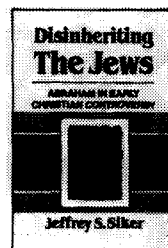
## Disinheriting the Jews Abraham in Early Christian Controversy

**Jeffrey S. Siker**

"A scholarly work of great interest and significance for both Christians and Jews. Siker helps us to see how strongly the figure of Abraham remains the father of all who believe. He also uses the portrayals of Abraham by early Christians as a lens through which to view the dynamics involved in the church's separation and estrangement from Judaism."

—Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *Weston School of Theology, Cambridge, Massachusetts*

Paper \$18.95



## From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis Devora Steinmetz

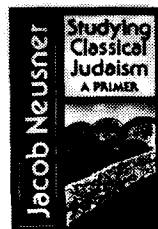
By closely examining patriarchal narratives, this book analyzes both the structure and word patterns that appear throughout the Book of Genesis and reflects the unfolding story of the birth of the Israelite nation. *In the series, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation*

Paper \$15.95

## Studying Classical Judaism: A Primer Jacob Neusner

By applying many of the same methods Christian scholars use to study Christianity, renowned scholar and author Jacob Neusner has achieved prominence for his pioneering insistence that the religious texts of Judaism be read as statements of religious convictions and systems, not merely as sources for historical fact finding.

Paper \$15.95



## Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary J.J.M. Roberts

Building on the work of previous scholarship, this commentary is an earnest attempt to hear the message of the ancient prophets, a message that remains relevant today. *In the series, Old Testament Library*

Hard \$19.95

Available from your local bookstore or direct from the publisher.  
(Please include \$1.50 per book for postage and handling.)

## WESTMINSTER/JOHN KNOX PRESS

100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396

# JUDAISM

Property of  
Ambassador College Library  
Big Sandy, TX 75755

\$6.00

SPRING 1991